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Number 31

FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline
Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge & Donald A. Luidens

Nihilism and the End of Law
Phillip E. Johnson

Other Plans: Journal of an Illness
James Andrew Miller

On A. N. Wilson and Gore Vidal
Paul V. Mankowski

Opinions and Reviews: First Installment of the Newtape File
Monkeys, MacKinnon & Marriage • The Death of Superman
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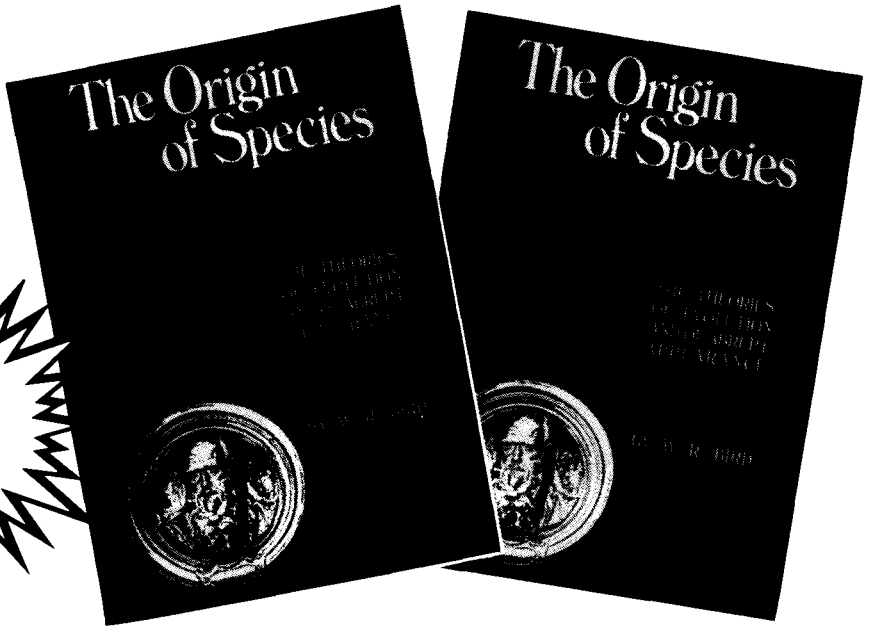

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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

MARCH 1993 • NUMBER 31

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FIRST THINGS

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Correspondence

Uses and Abuses of the Christian Right

Your editorial "The Electoral Uses and Abuses of Religion" (December 1992) was an excellent and much needed corrective warning. However, there are certain elements in your statement that are troubling.

First, it is clear that you are somewhat nervous and uncomfortable with the active political engagement of the religious right and especially the Christian Coalition. This apparent anxiety leads you to conclude that, for some, a choice must be made between being "a minister of the gospel" and being "a major player in the arena of electoral politics." Maybe I misunderstand your point. But, if not, then this is a false choice. (While you were referring in context specifically to Mr. Robertson, your conclusion does read as a more general admonishment.)

I am a Christian—a "minister of the gospel"—who finds his hope among fifteen million other Christians in the churches that make up the Southern Baptist Convention. Our confession of faith, the "Baptist Faith and Message," states that "every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in his own life and . . . should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love." Jesus Christ required no less when He commanded His followers to be the "salt" and "light" in society.

For Pat Robertson, Jesse Jackson, or any other Christian (seeking public office or not), there is no choice to be made. The Christian's decision regarding the Great Commission and public responsibility should not be an either/or option. Instead, it is a both/and requirement. There should be no direct call to shed the clerical collar in order to enter the sometimes raucous world of electoral politics. Evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry, a member of the FIRST THINGS Editorial Advisory Board, put it this way: "As citizens of two worlds, Christians know that the penalty for withholding exemplary guidance and involvement for the social common good is to surrender the political arena by default to non-Christian alternatives."

Second, you imply that the Christian Coalition speaks about "taking over America in the name of God." And while you grant that their posture may be a "defensive offense," you also suggest (correctly) that the "rhetoric of religious warfare must give way to civil argument and persuasion." However, I would argue that there is a difference between those who recognize the fact that we are indeed engaged in a cultural battle and those who are calling for "religious warfare." I would place the Christian Coalition among the former not among the latter.

Those who represent the Christian Coalition certainly do not need me to defend their cause. I am not a member of their organization. However, I do believe that we should take them at their word and accept them as civil participants in the public debate. Following the 1992 elections Dr. Ralph Reed, the executive director of the Christian Coalition, said the goal of his organization should be to rely on "strategies of persuasion, not domination." "We must be tolerant of diverse views and respectful of those who express them," he said. That sounds quite reasonable to me. It is certainly not the language of one calling for a religious war.

Your conclusion: "We must all make decisions about which course of action best approximates what we discern to be the will of God, but nobody unqualifiedly represents the will of God in the political arena." My guess is that (if you asked) Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition would probably endorse that conclusion.

Richard Sperbeck
Madison, VA

After reading your editorial I was puzzled. Somehow I recalled going through this before. Then I remembered that in the middle 1980s, after reading Richard John Neuhaus' *The*

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Naked Public Square and thinking about its content, I was similarily puzzled. My final perception at that time was that Neuhaus was proposing that the problems of the naked public square be resolved by the same type of people that had created the problems in the first place. It is my perception that First Things is doing essentially the same thing in this editorial.

I will not comment on specifics contained in the editorial except to say that I was disappointed with its rancor. There is no question that we have many major problems in this country of ours, but we must not dilute our efforts in solving the problems by engaging in tangential efforts.

It would not be too difficult to argue that our major problems are caused by straying too left of center. I do not believe that we should be too concerned about moving in the opposite ideological direction in looking for solutions. If corrective movements go too far, they can always be moved back towards the center.

Carl H. Carlson
Homewood, IL

Your editorial was in many ways an insightful analysis of the pervasive double standard practiced by the media when they tolerate religiously motivated political activity by the left but viciously attack such activity by those on the right. However, I must express my profound disappointment in your mischaracterizations of Christian Coalition and the many factual errors you printed.

For instance, you express the view that the name "Christian Coalition" is "offensively presumptuous," in large part because it is allegedly being applied to a "partisan political faction."

The fact of the matter is that, all the liberal media allegations notwithstanding, Christian Coalition is a nonpartisan organization. We do not endorse candidates, nor do we give money to candidates, even though there are instances where, by law, we are allowed to do so.

In addition, we do not, as you allege, suggest that people are not "true Christians" if they do not agree with our issues agenda. As the national director of our field program, I know of no instance where any staff member or leader in Christian Coalition has suggested any such thing.

Your article makes mention of inflammatory rhetoric such as "taking over America in the name of God." I would be interested to know the source of that quotation. Again, to my knowledge, no staff member or leader in Christian Coalition has made such a statement. Even if one has, that would be the exception to the generally understood goal of this organization. While the media certainly allege that we make such statements, the truth is we speak primarily in terms such as "giving Christians a voice in their government again."

You also allege that Pat Robertson "appears to want it all," i.e., that his ultimate intent is to advance his own personal ambitions. To this end you call upon Dr. Robertson to "let it be known whether he intends to run [for President] in 1996." The fact is, he has already made several public statements disavowing any intention of running in 1996, most recently on "Meet the Press," September 27, 1992.

The last statement with which I take issue is when you write: "The religious right is largely to blame for the sorry record of this year." While we have made our share of mistakes, you cannot begin to imagine the lengths to which many in the media will go to disparage who we are and what we are trying to accomplish. Space does not permit me to chronicle all the distortions, factual errors, and outright lies perpetrated in the media.

For instance, one of our state directors was identified as David Duke's campaign manager in an article in the *Denver Post*. This was absolutely untrue. One newspaper headline labeled us a "campaign cult." The *Phoenix Gazette* even went so far as to allege that our 1992 voter education project was underwritten by Charles Keating, another outright lie. These would be laughable if they weren't so tragic.

It is clear such media smears do tinge public opinion, evidenced by the fact that many of your mischaracterizations of Christian Coalition are exactly what the media are trying to foist upon the American people. To my knowledge, you did not talk to any of us in leadership at Christian Coalition before writing your editorial opinion. That is perhaps my greatest disappointment. For while we expect the hostile media to pillory us, we would hope that respected Christian leaders like yourselves would demonstrate keener discernment and exercise greater responsibility than evidenced by your editorial.

Guy Rodgers
National Field Director
Christian Coalition

The editors reply:
There apparently was one factual error, not "many factual errors," in our editorial. We are pleased to learn that Mr. Robertson has definitively taken himself out of the running for 1996.

As to other points raised by Mr. Rodgers: By the technical definition employed by the IRS the Christian Coalition may be nonpartisan. Partisan ordinarily means a cause or party advancing specific positions in the public arena, and, if Christian Coalition is not partisan by that measure, one might well wonder what is its reason for being. Yes, those who speak about a Christian agenda in the public arena and who form organizations called, for instance, the Christian Coalition, do, as we said, invite the inference that others who disagree are not true Christians. We are glad to be assured that language about Christians taking over America is "the exception" at the leadership level of Christian Coalition. We hope it will become ever more exceptional on its way to disappearing entirely. In addition, it is a mistake to assume, as Mr. Rodgers appears to assume, that everything in the editorial on the electoral abuse of religion was referring to the Christian Coalition. Finally, and for all the reasons given in the editorial, we continue to hope that Christian

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Coalition will change its name. It is presumptuous, and it does play into the hands of those who would depict Christianity as an alien force that "they" are trying to impose on "us."

Why Abortion Isn't Murder

In the November 1992 issue you once again express your opposition to abortion ("A New American Compact: Caring About Women, Caring for the Unborn"). There are several points that I want to respond to. The first point is your claim that the courts control abortion policy. I object to this analysis. The courts have ruled on abortion, but only within the confines of the law and the Constitution. The Constitution is our equivalent of the covenant God established with Israel. The covenant came first and the law amplified and explicated it. Likewise, the Constitution came first and our laws explicate it, even if in a contradictory and confusing manner. The Congress is free to pass an amendment to the Constitution, but until they do it is invalid to fault the courts for failing to do so. . . .

I strongly object to your argument that life begins prior to birth. . . . Humans are actually spirits. The spirit is not consciously detectable but it is the essence of the human. . . . The spirit exists prior to birth and will go on existing after the body dies. I propose that the spirit of a particular human enters the body along with the first breath of air. The spirit is involved in the development of the fetus from conception, but doesn't occupy the body until the first breath of air occurs. Not only is this consistent with the creation story, but it is consistent with the human experience. Anyone who has participated in the human birth experience knows that mothers have a fundamental deepening experience of their child after birth. I don't think this is because mothers suddenly develop maturity at the infant's birth, or because they can at that point in time see, hear, smell, taste, or touch the child. The basis for this response of the mother, I propose, is because it is not until after birth, or more specifically not until after the first voluntary breath of the child, that the full-fledged human is present. . . .

Does my premise that we are not uniquely human until after birth then result in supporting abortion? Absolutely not! It does, however, move the point of "humanness" until birth and eliminates any support for regulating, by law, what a woman does with her fetus prior to birth. Murder is when we deprive a spirit of its body . . . and therefore remove the possibility of future development in this life. Abortion, therefore, is not murder. . . . Murder is removing life from a spirit that already possesses it. Abortion is depriving a spirit of expected life.

When conception is considered to be the moment of life originating, the "Right to Life" movement is encouraged and given moral support. This is a major problem, because the fanaticism of the "Right to Life" movement is seen as an example of Christianity. It cannot be Christian to harass women, burn clinics, and interfere with people following their personal choices. It also creates hostility with the "Free Choice" movement. The "Free Choice" movement falsely defines abortion as a freedom issue. It is not a freedom issue, because any woman could carry a pregnancy to term, give the child up for adoption, and miss, at most, four to six weeks of work. . . .

Warren F. Metzler, M.D.
Hackensack, NJ

The Anti-Family Goddess

Olivia Vlahos' masterful survey of revived goddess mythology ("The Goddess That Failed," December 1992) emphasizes two enduring themes in the ancient record: the complementary if sometimes acrimonious interworking of the male and female principles, and the centrality of the marriage-based family. She asks if goddess religion reconstructed by feminist ideologues can serve the needs of modern men and women and answers with a firm negative.

Her comprehensive account nevertheless fails to address the scope of radical feminist family theory. It may appear to duplicate matrilineal kinship systems or claim direction from goddess-primary religions. But, in the minds of the most ambitious matriarchalists, it enters new territory where maternal power alone determines who may enter a family and who may remain and what a family is to begin with. That power is already partially realized with the exercise of the absolute abortion right that gives to the mother alone the right to determine whether a fetus shall become a child and whether a sperm donor shall become a father. That such a power is central to feminist family theory is demonstrated by the ferocity that meets any effort to restrict the abortion right, particularly any effort to give a father any say in—or even any knowledge of—the decision that determines the fate of his child. . . .

As Olivia Vlahos points out, most of [the woman's right to determine family structure] derived from opportunistic goddess theology. As far back as the early seventies, for example, radical feminist Adrienne Rich was using Bachofen's concept of the "mother right" to fashion a new kind of kinship system that, she believed, would "gynomorphize" society and establish the "Primacy of the Mother." Rich and other scholarly radicals like Gerda Lerner did not place unquestioned faith in goddess theology—nor in dead white European males like Bachofen—but saw in it a way of imagining a social system that would subordinate fatherhood to maternal discretion.

Less discriminating feminists such as Marilyn French embraced the new mythology as a redeeming faith. French wrote about a golden age when "there was a garden and in it we gathered fruits and vegetables and sang to the moon and worked together and watched the children grow." And sent the fathers packing when they were no longer needed. "Marriage," she said, "was informal, casual . . . the female was economically independent . . . male responsibility was for the most part limited . . . men were marginal." . . .

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The utopias envisioned by radicals have, as Olivia Vlahos points out, never appeared in any real-life society. That has not stopped them from pushing for a mother-right that grants the female parent autocratic discretion. Their efforts have not only contributed to the decline of the two-parent family but have frustrated its rehabilitation. In all societies, such a family was structured by the legitimacy principle that guaranteed for each child both a mother and a father. The concept of legitimacy has itself been deconstructed because, as Allan Bloom said, "Feminism has triumphed over the family." . . .

Frank S. Zepezauer
Sunnyvale, CA

Tradition, Yes and No

In reading Avery Dulles' "Tradition and Creativity in Theology" (November 1992), it was a pleasure to find the views of theologians and writers pointing out how fruitful tradition is and has been for them. Indeed, the "deposit of faith" could be defined as the pastness of the past and its presence in the present, in words used by T. S. Eliot. Or, as Chesterton wrote: "Man can only find life among the dead."

According to the article, Maurice Blondel's criticism of Modernism was to serve as Pius X's, for Blondel saw it as pure process without a stable content. By contrast, in Scholasticism there was a possible overlooking of personal involvement. Blondel also called attention to the paradoxical fact that the future is illumined by remaining faithful to the past.

It's not surprising that Chesterton should agree. In an essay in *The Illustrated London News* he wrote: "Every good thing has a personal and impersonal side. Religion, for instance, is a good thing, but it is no good unless it is both personal religion and impersonal religion." It is obvious the "personal" refers to love for Christ and "impersonal" to church dogma and teachings.

Charles Péguy is among the writers discussed in Dulles' article. Although the words "superficial and imperfect tradition" are not a quotation from Péguy, Fr. Dulles appears to be saying that Péguy's criticism was directed here. I am wondering whether it was not directed instead to a formalistic response to tradition (and not to the tradition itself) by the upper classes in nineteenth-century France. Péguy also criticized the privatization of religion. After so many years since Péguy, has the situation changed much here?

Margaret Waters
New York, NY

The sober reflections of Mmes. Glendon and Himmelfarb in your trilogy on Tradition and Creativity present a dramatic contrast to the rosy perspectives of Avery Dulles. Rather than a dispassionate commentary, the latter are more in the nature of an apologia. Indeed, the aberrant creativity found in law, culture, and the writing of history would seem [according to Fr. Dulles] not to have occurred in the progress of recent contemporary theology, or has been of little consequence. This is not really the whole truth. Shorn of jargon and the dutiful invocation of *Dei Verbum* and the Holy Spirit, Dulles constructs an idealized model capable of bringing forth not only "new things and old," but also good things and bad.

Theological "new insights" of our experience are heavily predicated on historical-critical constructs that are now seriously in question. And derivative liturgical and pedagogical norms reflect an *experiential* theology that totters precariously on an epistemology of prayerful perspective. Interestingly, the entire edifice awaits the wrecking ball, thanks to a few tiny shreds of papyrus found in a cave near the Dead Sea.

Tradition and creativity in theology remains a topic much in need of discussion. It pertains to a tragic episode touching the lives of millions of the faithful, something that Avery Dulles appears not to recognize.

Richard F. O'Neill
Coeur d'Alene, ID

Avery Dulles replies:

The letters of Margaret Waters and Richard F. O'Neill to some degree offset each other. The former contains, among many points of agreement, one mild criticism. She suggests that I would have done better not to speak of a "superficial and imperfect tradition." In response I would say that this term seems to me to correspond to what I think Péguy had in mind when he spoke of "traditional moins profonde" and of "traditional moins parfaite."

Richard O'Neill, from an opposite perspective, faults me for overlooking the phenomenon of "aberrant creativity." If by this he means a departure from the true tradition, there is of course no lack of it in theology. But my purpose was to examine how creativity can be combined with fidelity to the tradition.

I could not in one article address all the problems to which Mr. O'Neill is referring. For those interested in the Qumram scrolls, I can recommend Joseph A. Fitzmyer's recent book, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Paulist, 1992) and his article in *Commonweal*, December 18, 1992.

Orthodoxy and Civility

Orthodox Brother James Miller's letter (November 1992) defending Orthodox behavior in Eastern Europe against what are deemed to be Catholic incursions reminds me of so many other statements coming out of Orthodoxy these days. With barely a nod toward civility it calls Roman Catholicism and Protestantism "Western half-truths." Within the Western churches one almost never hears such uncharitable and inflammatory language used with regard to the Orthodox or any other confession. Among the Orthodox clergy and hierarchy, the imputation of base motivations to Catholics seems to go on incessantly.

It is not that there is nothing to be said by the Catholics with regard to Orthodox behavior toward them. There is plenty. In very recent history, it seemed to many Catholics that some Orthodox brethren not only

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passively stood by while every sort of persecution was visited upon Catholics but also eagerly concurred in it.

Catholics, however, are not willing to let their perceptions of such behavior get in the way of trying to reach out to the Orthodox. It is time the Orthodox reached back by first adopting a tone of civility and charitableness in their references to Catholic activity. Harsh public language against Catholics leads to anti-Catholic hatred among Orthodox populations and to atrocities such as those now seen in Bosnia. It is time the Orthodox realized that such language, and the division attendant upon it, permits evil an opening to work its way. I believe this may be discerned to be the historical lesson of Christian division.

Stanley Gaines
Mesquite, TX

About That Stolen Moment

"...saw little of note except
...fortunately the Duomo was on
that walk...": from a letter

The *Duomo* cathedral hung its own weather
above you. A light fog, full-massed as gray silk,
hovered as a helicopter might for some yet-to-ascend saint.
You heard noise where hidden workmen chipped away
at the eves of the roof or at the thumbnails of gargoyles
that guarded leaky ceiling points; you imagined a man
living a decade hip-deep in rose-white marble
he carved into adornments and placed atop columns
or attached to the flying buttresses.
You, at six feet tall, knew you were as large as a small leaf
at the point of a window's curve,
or as small as a crack you could not have seen above you
on the clearest day. It had been years
since you had been a Catholic and you thought it showed,
but you could have stood there forever.
Nights at home you sit up for hours after your family is asleep,
the black dog comes,
and you write another story;
characters speak aloud. The dog howls.
You hear it as you heard the workmen of the *Duomo*.
Do they go a little crazy some nights, too?
You know you want to live long enough to do the right thing,
and yet something old that you never expected
to be everywhere you went says, "I dare you. Starve for art;
throw the pee-colored snake oil vials away,
the ones you *schlepp* country to country. Go on—
disappear into an Italian film, be the one to run away to Sicily
and hang out, eating fruit with that brown-eyed girl
you saw in Milan, her body as lively as any of the best sets of lines
Matisse ever slapped perfectly alive on canvas."

Pat James

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Opinion

The Newtape File: I

As compiled by Jean Bethke Elshtain, she having discovered a mysterious virus in her computer one day as she worked on yet another piece on whither virtue . . .

Dear Nephew, my little popinjay,

My mood is nearly jaunty. Please don't misunderstand. My dyspepsia and misanthropy are intact. But things have been going so well for us lately that I have decided I can take occasional hemlock breaks. I have quaffed a few this evening. This no doubt accounts for my jubilation—a word I don't much like, frankly, as it belongs to the Enemy's armamentorium far more than our own. I fear I shall disgust you, but you are no doubt familiar with the Enemy's notion of the kerygma or "good news," this good news being "That they might have life and might have it more abundantly." Their good news was terrible news for Our Father Below. Frankly, we were overwhelmed for many human centuries combatting this idea. Fortunately we were able, through a good deal of terribly hard work of which you are the heir (and please do not forget it), to enlist some of the Enemy's own camp in our effort. I recall many of Cursed Memory who presented a wonderfully sour and pinched notion of what faith—a frisson seizes me whenever I must write that wretched word—required. So long as we could push the notion that the good news was really bad news of the most sour and nasty sort we at least had a fighting chance.

We have succeeded most gloriously. There is no precise turning point, but over time our legions managed to press the notion that freedom and faith were antinomies—yes, stark opposites!—and it seems our victory in this regard is secure, at least in that great republic in which you and I now make our temporary abode. Why, I have had two vacations in the past decade! You, of course, cannot afford to take one just yet because there are tough cases in that not-yet-accursed geographic region to which I have assigned you. Can you not do something with the Smith Family of Fremont, Nebraska? You did succeed, my precious pervertlet, in convincing them of the need for what is called Cable TV. But the parents seem to have set strict hours for viewing and will not permit the five-year-old to watch MTV despite the fact that her best friend is well and truly "into it," as one of their slang expressions has it. Ah, but I didn't write to chide you. Not tonight. For I have had my own "good news." Our new computer system is working wonderfully. It is much easier to track our progress, and progress it is: this calls for more hemlock!

Let me just summarize a few of our triumphs, for I know you are a bit "down" about the wretched Smiths and other such hard cases. I have already noted the glorious equation by The Enemy of freedom with license and faith with servitude of the most life-denying sort. But there is much else to be thankful for as we look back on those weeks of consumerist excess called The Holiday Season. Another triumph for us, by the way, for we have nearly effaced—at least in the media, more and more our faithful allies on many fronts—any serious and solid mention of The Enemy Savior, that "true Baby, with flesh, blood, hands, and legs," as our foe, Martin Luther, described Him. Away in the Manger and all that. If only we could get those hideous Christmas hymns banned! A bevy of our dedicated legal servants are working on this front and I am confident of a victory in the first decade of the next millennium. Our strategy is to have all such reminders of that stubborn infant removed from public sight and sound. Yes, I know, the churches remain a visible redoubt, a reminder to those not yet solidly in the camp of Our Father Below. But who knows? So many wondrous things have fallen into our lap with but modest effort on our part. Perhaps we will one day see churches themselves stripped of outward insignia of the faith. Perhaps we can get them ensconced behind high walls, the architectural equivalent of what I believe is called a "brown paper bag." This "brown paper bag" was at one time a lingering sign of residual shame, as our sort of viewing and reading matter was required to be covered up. Yes, I feel the bile rise at the triumphant thought: we have uncovered what was once shameful. Now we must push to cover what was once (and in some recalcitrant minds is yet) sacred. These reversals are what we seek.

It is nearly time for my soft-core porn film on a TV channel devoted exclusively to the purpose—and round-the-clock at that! Feature it: the lonely housewife, the agitated adolescent, the bored businessman, the gullible child, all can now be drawn with a mere push on the button of their remotes into a world of fleshly excess so at odds with the Enemy's eros. In this never-ending struggle for and over the body we have been required from the beginning to insinuate the view that faith and the body's needs and desires were at war with one another. This has been a very tricky fight and you may be too young to understand it fully. We have worked ceaselessly to instill the notion that life and

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joy were reducible to momentary and passing pleasure of the most "instant" sort. We had to get people hooked, addicted to the fleshly, hence at war with their own bodies. But I exhaust myself to think of this effort. I will instruct you further in future letters. Let us just savor the moment.

Your affectionate uncle,
Newtape

The contents of the Newtape File were first disclosed at a symposium, "Seedbeds of Virtue," sponsored by the New York-based Institute for American Values last November in Cambridge, Mass.

Monkeys, MacKinnon & Marriage

George A. Tobin

Twenty years ago, the U.S. Army directed me to help monkeys copulate. In order to carry out my mission to increase and multiply the lab animal population of the armed forces of the United States, I was placed under the direction of an eccentric old man (also named George), a civilian employee who had spent over a decade helping monkeys reproduce in that laboratory colony. In much the same way in which Luke Skywalker initially failed to discern the true identity and wisdom of his mentor Yoda, I dismissed George as an affable crackpot. I have only recently come to realize that George was in fact a world-class anthropological theorist and social philosopher. He not only anticipated some of the now-dominant theories in human sociobiology circles but identified the principles that are now the explicit basis for celebrated feminist social criticism. Had I the foresight to cultivate the insights he imparted, I could have been a cutting-edge scholar. Alas, others have long since beat me to it.

George never read any academic journals nor did he ever publish his ideas. Nevertheless, this high school graduate who spent ten years in a windowless room watching monkeys copulate arrived independently at many of the same conclusions now propounded by recognized scholars. When I first began to see George's ideas appear in print in scientific articles, I didn't know whether to marvel at George's acumen or to harbor serious reservations about the state of anthropological scholarship. When I later encountered his ideas in a leading legal treatise on the state of women under the law, I could no longer bring myself to question the significance of George's reflections or resist trying to apply them. Besides, what better use of my GI Bill education than to present what I know now to have been the intellectual high point of my military career?

George's methods were intuitive and drew largely upon his encyclopedic knowledge of monkey sexual behavior. His approach was fiercely anthropomorphic—he claimed to know the moods and idiosyncrasies of each of his charges and gave each of them names. He had a special affection for Old Joe, the senior male in the colony. At the time I was introduced to Old Joe, he was about twelve years old and would have been long past his breeding prime had he lived in the wild. He often sat back on the top floor of his two-story cage (special-ordered by George) with his legs crossed (a highly unusual pose for monkeys), casting expressive looks across the room at members of his harem. One could easily envision Old Joe in a smoking jacket with a martini, shaken not stirred. Old Joe was also the only male in the breeding colony with a foreplay ritual, however abbreviated it may have seemed to the untrained eye. Our younger, less secure males, such as Joe's heir apparent, the evil and sadistic Sultan, tended to be violent and rapid in the performance of their duties. Advancing age and a certain eccentric flair were characteristics shared by Old Joe and Old George and formed the basis of a peculiar but deep vicarious bond.

On occasions while I was scraping militarily critical specimens from various cage bottoms, George would offer terse reflections on the nature of Man and Monkey. Perhaps I didn't give much credence to George's theory of evolution because I was usually handling rhesus droppings at the time or simply trying to keep from being scratched or bitten. Presumably, had the same ideas been delivered in a college auditorium (as they now often are) they would have made a different impression.

George's central theory was that human evolution from primate ancestors was not driven primarily by brain development but by changes in sexual characteristics. He noted that females in every primate species but ours exhibit extraordinary bodily changes when fertile. In the female rhesus monkey, for example, estrus causes the face, chest, and buttocks to turn bright red and distinct hormonal odors to be emitted. There is not much room for mystery or subtlety on her part when the whole jungle knows of her condition.

George theorized that the female precursor of humans ("Eve") was a primate like Suzy, a member of the colony who not only went into heat more often than the other females but who seemed

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strangely receptive even when not hormonally programmed to copulate. According to George, her mate ("Adam") was a clever, stylish, sexually animated primate not unlike Old Joe. "Adam" forsook the rest of his harem for this one female who was sexually receptive far more often. George further theorized that "Eve" was *unpredictably* receptive, thus forcing "Adam" to think about clues to her behavior that would tell him when she would be. "Eve" in turn sought to use this mystery to her advantage by requiring various forms of positive behavior from Adam before issuing a favorable response. This rapidly evolving game created a new selective pressure that forced "Adam" and "Eve" to use their brains much more, thus forever driving human brain evolution forward.

George's model can be reduced to a formal game of competing male and female goal systems. Male goals according to this model are largely coextensive with the list of warnings typically issued by parents of teenage girls on prom night. Defining female goals is more difficult because, by definition, they continually evolve. Presumably, some relatively constant female goals would include material support and protection for herself and her offspring as well as intimate companionship. However, the order, accuracy, and completeness of this list is open to question. The fact that after eons of evolution men invariably claim not to know what women really want is itself a striking confirmation of George's theory.

George's theory of human evolution has been restated or touched upon by a number of evolutionary biologists and anthropologists. While there are significant variations, nuances, and many open questions, such as whether to characterize the absence of estrus in humans as "concealed ovulation" or a form of "permanent estrus display," the dominant assumptions appear to be remarkably consistent with George's. The prevailing sociobiological hypothesis can be summarized as follows: Because the protohuman male never quite knew when his mate would get pregnant, and because he rather enjoyed maximizing the chances of his genetic survival through frequent attempts to insure such a pregnancy, he was more inclined to hang around on a regular basis to provide food and occasionally even help her around the cave in between couplings. This supportive behavior by sexually eager males conferred a selective advantage on protohuman females whose sexual receptivity was independent of fertility cycles. The Tool-Making Animal was thus less concerned with mastery of his environment than in looking for clever ways to impress his unpredictable mate.

In addition to confirmation by leading evolutionary biologists and anthropologists, the behavioral goal assumptions underpinning George's model are also surprisingly consistent with feminist social analysis. For example, legal scholar and leading feminist theorist Catherine MacKinnon has opined that human sexuality is "socially constructed" to maximize the perceived sexual desirability of women. According to MacKinnon, sexuality is "socially organized to require sex inequality for excitement and satisfaction," or, "to put it another way, perhaps gender must be maintained as a social hierarchy so that men will be able to get erections; or, part of the male interest in keeping women down lies in the fact that it gets men up." For MacKinnon, the all-pervasive influence of the male sex drive even preconditions scholarly efforts to analyze its effects. In yet another unfelicitously worded passage, she observes:

> To list and analyze what seem to be the essential elements for male sexual arousal, what has to be there for the penis to work, seems faintly blasphemous, like a pornographer doing market research. Sex is supposed both too individual and universally transcendent for that. To suggest that the sexual might be continuous with something other than sex itself—something like politics—is seldom done, is treated as detumescent, even by feminists. It is as if sexuality came from the stork.

Evidence of the validity of MacKinnon's thesis that the overpowering male sex drive has corrupted our ability to fully recognize its pervasiveness can be found in the fact that men who read her works often find her characterizations utterly foreign to their own experience. Chronicles of unyielding male prowess may seem perversely flattering and yet tend to evoke feelings of profound unworthiness. I, for one, felt estranged from my gender after reading works of MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. If by chromosomal birthright I have been eligible to join the rape of creation at every level of being, why wasn't I notified? More troubling still is whether my wife would let me go even if the other fellows are indeed saving a place for me in the longboat. The certainty of having to ask a woman for permission to embark on missions of metaphysical rape is difficult to reconcile with my newly discovered paradigmatic status.

George's model differs from MacKinnon's variant in one very important respect. George's evolutionary model necessarily implies that male behavior must continually be modified to adjust to ever more complex female goals. Under George's model, it is therefore necessary by definition for numerous instances of consensual heterosexual intercourse to have taken place in the course of human history in order to drive human evolution. President Reagan was no doubt thinking along the same lines when he observed that but for the influence of

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women we would still be living in caves. In contrast, MacKinnon's model is founded on the assumption that a human male cannot achieve his sexual objectives unless the physical, psychological, and/or social context of the act is nonconsensual. Thus, non-rape is the exception, by definition.

Another way to view the difference is that MacKinnon sees Adam as someone like Sultan, whereas George envisioned the father of mankind to have been someone much more like Old Joe. More significantly, "Eve" or Suzy is largely irrelevant for MacKinnon (as are all other ardently heterosexual females, for that matter), whereas "Eve" is the sine qua non of human evolution for George. For George, the chief limitation on male goal-attainment is the expanding nature of female preconditions. MacKinnon believes that a complete male sexual victory was achieved on a permanent basis long ago. The dynamic of human evolution in her model is thus exclusively masculine. The mere sexual conquest of women was grossly insufficient to sate human male sexual ambition. Thus, she ascribes to the human male a sexual drive of truly Jovian proportions such that even the rape of cultures, nations, and planets cannot fatigue it.

Like MacKinnon's variant, George's model can be expanded beyond the confines of evolutionary biology. Indeed, the model works rather well as a theory of modern social organization. If we consider that in recent stages of our evolution, both the male and female goals defined in George's model were largely obtainable only through the institution of marriage, we should be able to test the predictive power of the model by examining how well it explains our behavior in this era of apparent marital decline.

The baby boom phenomenon offers a good opportunity to test the model in a social context. Because males generally seek marriage partners a few years younger and/or females prefer more mature husbands, each annual cohort of baby boom males had an excess of available potential mates. For example, females born between 1950-1955 significantly outnumbered males born between 1948-1953. Thus, the (George-defined) bargaining position of those males was enhanced. Therefore, it is not surprising that the 1970s emerged as the golden age of the lounge lizard. George's model clearly predicts that the rise of Hugh Hefner and the Playboy empire was a direct, even if ironic, result of two decades of stable, highly fertile American family life.

Similarly, the observed effects of the so-called baby bust fit within the model. It has been noted by astute demographers that at the time the baby bust generation began to reach marriage age, the articles in women's magazines began to depart from the "Why He Won't Commit" genre to articles about "The New Morality" and reactions to the sexual excesses of the previous decade. This can be explained under George's model as directly attributable to a demographic reverse of the sexual bargaining equation. As of the early 1960s, each birth cohort of males was followed by a smaller cohort of females, thus reducing the competitive market value of what males had to offer. The decline of disco, guys with gold chains, and the lounge lizard was thus a predictable phenomenon according to the model.

Another factor in the modern data set we must bring before the model is the mass entry of women into the work force and the erection of social policies that transfer benefits other than through bonds with particular male breadwinners. These changes would suggest that because women have alternative sources for some of their presumed goals, the male bargaining position would be weakened. Conversely, the radical development of contraceptive technology suggests that males would have more opportunity to achieve their defined objective at net lower cost. Where the investments of both parties in the exchange have thus been devalued, the model predicts that the parties would attach less value to the exchange. This prediction is consistent with the actual rise of casual cohabitation and of sexual contacts devoid of preconditions, as well as increased divorce and serial monogamy. Again, the model applies.

This glowingly successful model can be expanded further to establish predictions about the future evolution of humans and human social systems. The key, of course, is the nature of female expectations concerning male behavior. For MacKinnon, however, female expectations are forever linguistically, socially, and politically invisible barring the advent of a detumescent revolution. If we consider the volume of women's grievances that do manage to be voiced on magazine racks and daytime television, and if we also accept the weight of anecdotal evidence that wives somehow manage to articulate disappointments to their husbands, and if this is what constitutes an invisibility of female grievances, then the coming detumescent revolution will surely possess a ferocity of unimaginable proportions.

The prospect of exponentially unmet female demands, coupled with the increased ability of both sexes to obtain fundamental objectives other than through intensive involvement with each other, implies a new equilibrium with distressing implications. Unless the structure of the underlying game is dramatically altered, the species will soon exhaust the developmental momentum of previous eons. Indeed, George once observed that the primitive stasis of the rhesus monkey was largely due to the fact that once a male rhesus obtained senior status "he didn't have to do anything to get laid."

Having unlocked the mysteries of past and present

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human behavior with the keys left us by George, we can only speculate as to what forms a radical leap to escape our impending evolutionary stasis might take. For example, male goals of sustained affection for, and a personal connection to, women and children might be sufficient to restore and enhance the evolutionary dynamic. The possibility that such items may have always been on the male list even if historically not acted upon with sufficient vigor may be the single greatest potential flaw in George's otherwise powerful model. His model explains the behavior of cads, philanderers, and casanovas rather well but not that of men who appear to remain faithful to their wives and children. It is plainly unsatisfying to try to characterize the family lives of numerous apparently faithful husbands and fathers as extraneous coital interludes or coital inducement rituals. (The MacKinnon model is simpler in this respect; since there is no need to make distinctions among rapists, the issue does not arise.)

I hesitate to draw definite conclusions about the scientific value of pursuing an impertinence such as marital virtue, especially given my obvious lack of qualifications having spent only one year in a windowless room watching monkeys copulate. Then again, an entire year of processing scraped monkey droppings may have been the best possible preparation for engaging the great social and anthropological paradigms of our time. The heretical question as to what men and women ought to offer one another may be worth pursuing if for no other reason than it prevents us from stepping in the paradigmatic alternatives.

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The Death of Superman

Herbert London

The man of steel, the one who routinely saved the planet from the ravages of evil invaders, is dead. Superman is gone. Future generations will grow up not knowing "It's a bird, it's a plane . . . it's Superman!" Last November, Superman was killed by Doomsday, a villainous escapee from a cosmic insane asylum.

Superman was born in 1938. He was raised in an era when it seemed that supermen were needed to defeat Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito. He penetrated the Iron Curtain with his heroic defense of the American way against Soviet despotism. With the exception of his vulnerability to kryptonite, Superman was invulnerable to physical assault. That is what made him so appealing in the past and so unappealing today.

Superman died, not because, as the *New York Times* alleges, Hollywood created a lumbering and exhausted facsimile; he died because the country doesn't admire superheroes. After years in which heroes have been derided and mocked, when physical strength has been subordinated to sensitivity—the highest virtue in the new age—it is understandable that superman must go. His assets were inconsistent with an era of moral ambiguity and androgynous sexual leanings.

Clark Kent used his perch on the top floor of the *Daily Planet* to survey the scene in Metropolis. He responded to any crime by changing into his Superman cape and flying off to rescue someone in distress. But the *Daily News*, often associated with the *Planet*, is in financial trouble from which it may not recover; Superman himself would not recognize the chaos in New York at the moment; and relative innocents like Lois Lane and Clark Kent couldn't survive in this urban quagmire.

Telephone booths don't exist for Clark Kent's wardrobe change. The skies over most urban centers are filled with aircraft circling to land; Superman would be a hazard to air traffic. Clark's interest in Lois Lane would most likely be interpreted as sexual harassment. Superman didn't suffer from *angst*; he went about his business of rounding up the bad guys without any concession to the *Miranda* decision.

Superman as hero doesn't fit with the antiheroes of this age. Now we seek figures who are tortured by psychological ambivalence. We expect failure and occasional apostasy; people of deep conviction, unwavering in their belief and successful to boot, are virtually unrecognizable in the present cultural environment.

Superman has gone the way of many other comic strip characters of his generation. Joe Palooka has been interred along with Captain Marvel. Yet Superman was different: he was more bold than the others; he found legislative gridlock and bureaucratic police activity a source of derision; he made decisions on the spot.

Superman was also unusual in that he defied gravity. When he was first created there wasn't much commercial air traffic. Now everyone flies, rockets have taken men to the moon, and jets can be installed in one's boots so that one can take off by oneself. Technology has caught up with Superman. He could stop a bullet in flight; he could fly faster than a jet airplane and he could penetrate steel with infra-red rays from his eyes. Such feats

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of derring-do for youngsters brought up on the magic of television, however, are not particularly awe-inspiring. In his middle years, Superman was made bland by the very rush of modernity.

There are rumors that Superman will be resurrected. But I'm not convinced that will happen. In any case it seems unlikely that such an event would engender much interest. Superman is after all an anachronism, a model of a bygone era when virtue mattered, when morality wasn't relative, when the distinction between good and evil didn't require an arcane hour-long lecture. After all, Clark Kent was a simple man with a basic middle-American sense of justice. In his Kent persona Superman could be confused with Tom Sawyer, a kind of American Adam.

There will of course be new comic book heroes, but they are likely to resemble their television counterparts—technical wizards and moral dwarfs. Superman was indeed a figure towering above the others, a hero to emulate. Like the heroes of yesteryear he is gone, and with his interment go popular heroism and sacrifice for the public good. Superman will be missed, but the virtue he embodied will be missed even more.

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Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline

Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge & Donald A. Luidens

America's so-called mainline Protestant churches aren't what they used to be. For generations on end, the Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and kindred denominations reported net annual membership gains. As recently as the 1950s their growth rate equalled or exceeded that of the United States as a whole.

But in the early 1960s their growth slowed down, and after the middle of the decade they had begun to lose members. With very few exceptions, the decline has continued to this date. Never before had any large religious body in this country lost members steadily for so many years. By 1990 these denominations had lost between one-fifth and one-third of the membership they claimed in 1965 and the proportion of Americans affiliated with them had reached a twentieth-century low.

Many theories have been advanced to explain why these old denominations have fallen on hard times. The least credible theory attributes their decline to the secularizing effects of industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of mass education. If secularization were the sole explanation, all but the most culturally insulated sectors of American religion would be losing members. In fact, many sectors are holding their own very well and others are growing. Biblically conservative nondenominational Christian fellowships, for example, are among the fastest growing, and their typical location is not in rural Appalachia but in major metropolitan centers. To explain the decay of the mainline denominations, one must look instead for special factors at work within these churches themselves or in the lives of their constituents.

The first step toward identifying these special factors was the discovery, in the late 1970s, that the principal source of the decline was the tendency of many adolescents who had been confirmed in these denominations from the early 1960s on to drop out of church and not return. It was the children of the members themselves—and especially those born after World War II—who were leading the exodus. Some, of course, returned to church when they married and had children, but not enough to replenish the ranks. In the meantime, of course, the average age of the membership was steadily increasing. One can sit today in the balcony of a typical United Methodist church and look over a congregation of graying and balding heads. Unless there is a surge of new recruits, rising death rates will diminish the ranks of the mainline denominations even further in the years ahead.

Why have so many young people departed? One theory attributes the decline to the shift toward greater individual autonomy and freedom from institutional restraints that got under way in the mid-1960s. This shift, which found its most flamboyant expression in the counterculture, was spearheaded by young white people from middle-class families, a disproportionate number of which were, for historic reasons, affiliated with mainline Protestant churches. Another theory traces the decline to the fact that middle-class people born since World War II are far more likely than their predecessors to have earned higher degrees, presumably absorbing in the process the agnosticism of

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modern academia.

But other theories attribute the decline to factors internal to the mainline churches themselves. The first of these, widely propounded in the late 1960s but no longer heard, attributes the exodus of young people to protest against the churches' supposed indifference to the sufferings and struggles of the blacks, the poor, and other oppressed groups. The advocates of this notion argued that if the church did not become "relevant" it would lose its youth. Another theory, highly popular among religious conservatives today, makes the opposite argument. It contends that people have left the mainline churches in protest against the support that denominational officials and agencies have given since the mid-1960s to left-wing causes such as abortion rights and Third World revolutionary movements. According to its proponents, those who have deserted the mainline churches have done so in search of a richer spiritual diet.

A third intra-religious theory was advanced by Dean M. Kelley in his controversial book, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, published in 1972. Kelly argued that the mainline denominations have lost members because they have become weak as religious bodies. Strong religions provide clear-cut, compelling answers to questions concerning the meaning of life, mobilize their members' energies for shared purposes, require a distinctive code of conduct, and discipline their members for failure to live up to it. Weak religions allow a diversity of theological viewpoints, do not and can not command much of their members' time or effort, promote few if any distinctive rules of conduct, and discipline no one for violating them. In short, strong religions foster a level of commitment that binds members to the group; weak religions have low levels of commitment and are unable to resist influences that lower it even further.

Since careful tests of these theories have never been made, no consensus has emerged as to which, if any, of them best explains why mainline churches have lost members. To gain new insights into the reasons for the decline, the three of us decided to interview a national sample of baby boomers who had been confirmed in mainline Protestant churches during the 1960s. To simplify our task, we concentrated on a single denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), formed in 1983 by merger of the nation's two largest Presbyterian bodies. In 1989, with a grant from the Lilly Endowment, we drew samples of names from confirmation lists of churches in six states and located as many people in the samples as we could. We completed 500 Gallup-style telephone interviews and forty face-to-face follow-up interviews.

We found that fully 75 percent of our baby boom confirmands had dropped out of church at one time or other, typically around age twenty-one, and that about half of the drop-outs are now active again in some church. In all, 52 percent of the baby boomers are currently "churched" by our definition, that is, they attend some church at least six times a year *and* are enrolled members. Six percent of the confirmands have become self-styled fundamentalists, 10 percent have joined other mainline denominations, 7 percent are active members of Catholic, Baptist, or other churches outside the Protestant mainline, and 8 percent are agnostics or atheists who have severed their ties with organized religion completely. Of the remainder, the largest categories are people who are still active Presbyterians (29 percent), people who either belong to a church but do not attend or attend but are reluctant to join (19 percent), and people who describe themselves as religious but who neither belong nor attend (21 percent).

Our findings cast doubt on most of the popular theories about the decline of mainline churches. We were mildly surprised to learn that participation in countercultural activities is only weakly correlated to church participation today. Involvement in the counterculture is associated with unorthodox theological views, as well as with liberal positions on controversial issues of sexuality, reproduction, and gender, but it is not a good predictor of church involvement itself. Similarly, the amount of formal education has no bearing on how active one is in church. The handful of confirmands in our sample who have earned Ph.D.'s tend to be irreligious, but exposure to a college education does not serve to explain mainline church decline. Our fundamentalists, for example, were as well educated as any of the other groups in the sample. Most of those who lost their faith, or who adopted unorthodox opinions, did so *before*, not after, going to college. College may not strengthen faith, but for most baby boomers it did not initiate doubt.

When we asked our sample of confirmands why they had dropped out of church we found virtually no support either for the theory that the church has become "socially irrelevant" or for the theory that church decline represents a protest against the radical agenda of denominational elites. One woman we interviewed quit her local Presbyterian church in 1971 because of its indifference to issues of war and race, and a few others grumbled about the denomination's commitment to left-wing causes, but the vast majority said nothing about these matters. From our interviews we formed the firm impression that most baby boomers brought up in a Presbyterian church know little or nothing about the policies promoted by denominational officials. For them—and perhaps for their elders as well—"church" refers only to the local congregations with which they are familiar, and does not

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extend to the higher echelons of denominations.

What is more, we found little evidence of a polarization on theological and moral issues among those baby boomers who remain active in a mainline church. Most of them have mixed views on controversial issues. A surprising number, for example, would like prayers to be said in the public schools but have no objection to the ordination of avowed homosexuals. The fundamentalists and the irreligious in our sample are poles apart on such topics, but active baby boom mainliners tend to be liberal on one issue and conservative on another. Our findings lead us to suspect that today's culture war within the mainline Protestant denominations is waged mainly by national elites and only rarely engages the attention and the passions of ordinary church members.

The theory that people have left the mainline churches in search of more nourishing spiritual food fared a little better, but it applies only to the 6 percent of the baby boomers in our sample who have become fundamentalists, and to a few more who have joined other orthodox denominations. It does not apply to the large number who describe themselves as religious but who rarely go to church. We found no evidence that a substantial portion of these people are deeply concerned with religious questions or have explored a variety of religious options. Less than 13 percent of them have ever belonged to any church but the Presbyterian and only a tiny fraction have ever been involved in a non-Christian group. In short, our baby boom drop-outs did not leave the Presbyterian church in search of salvation or enlightenment; they left because religion itself had become low on their list of personal priorities. They pray occasionally, they hold Jesus in high esteem, and they have some interest in such questions as the purpose of existence and the fate of the soul after death, but they do not consider it necessary to attend church in order to nourish what faith they have.

In our study, the single best predictor of church participation turned out to be *belief*—orthodox Christian belief, and especially the teaching that a person can be saved only through Jesus Christ. Virtually all our baby boomers who believe this are active members of a church. Among those who do not believe it, some are active in varying degrees; a great many are not. Ninety-five percent of the drop-outs who describe themselves as religious do not believe it. And amazingly enough, fully 68 percent of those who are still active Presbyterians don't believe it either.

What *do* these nonorthodox "religious" baby boomers believe? Statistical analysis of their responses to our Gallup-style telephone questions revealed a "pick and choose" pattern similar to the one that sociologist Reginald Bibby found in a nationwide study of Canadians. For example, almost all our active Presbyterians believe in God and that Jesus Christ was the son of God, but almost 60 percent also believe that "all the different religions of the world are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth."

Bibby assumed that Canadians' theological choices are as individualized and hard to predict as the choices that diners make in a cafeteria. In follow-up interviews with our baby boomers we tried to find some pattern in the various choices they make. In doing so, we discovered that most fundamentalists, and a minor fraction of the active Presbyterians, have a well-articulated, theologically conservative understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the nature of the Bible, the Christian life, and the afterlife. Moreover, their theological language closely resembles the discourse, both spoken and written, of today's evangelical and fundamentalist leaders. Many theological conservatives told us they are actively involved in Bible study groups and that they regularly discuss theological and moral issues with their pastors and fellow churchgoers. They know a great deal, and they are eager to learn more.

But we also discovered a pattern in the theological views of people who, on the Gallup-style theological questions, seemed to pick and choose their responses in unorthodox ways. We have named this pattern the theology of *lay liberalism*. It is "liberal" because its defining characteristic is the rejection of the view that Christianity is the only religion with a valid claim to truth. It is "lay" because it does not reflect any of the theological systems contained in the writings or seminary lectures of today's post-orthodox Christian intellectuals. Our interviewees did not speak the language of liberation theology, feminist theology, or the theology of Presbyterian General Assembly pronouncements. Lay liberalism does borrow from the views of certain dead intellectuals, but it is largely a homemade product, a kind of modern-age folk religion. Unlike contemporary evangelicalism or other versions of Christian orthodoxy, lay liberalism is not a highly elaborated or richly developed system of thought.

Most lay liberals "prefer" Christianity to other faiths, but they are unable to ground their preference in strong truth claims. A few simply told us that Christianity is "true for me," whereas Buddhism or Islam may be true for others, and some explained that they preferred Christianity because they were raised in that faith. But most lay liberals we talked to were uneasy with the nihilistic implications of this line of thought, and they proposed some universal grounding for their religious preference. Some believe that a common thread of truth runs through all the world's major religions and that at base all religions teach the same thing. These people can give seemingly orthodox responses to Gallup-style items about Jesus and the Bible, but

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on closer questioning it turns out they believe that God also had a hand in writing the Koran and the Buddhist sutras. If God helped write all the world's scriptures, there is no harm in belonging to any religion that one finds congenial. Lay liberals have a much broader notion of what is religiously respectable than old-time Presbyterians had. They are hard put to offer theological reasons why anyone should remain a Presbyterian, or even a Christian.

Another way lay liberals try to avoid nihilism is by arguing that all the major world religions teach a common moral code whose contents in the Judeo-Christian tradition are contained in the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. Even the skeptics and cynics in our sample seemed genuinely to respect such virtues as honesty, helping others, and generally "leading a good life," and they praised churches for inculcating these virtues. From our interviews, we formed the firm impression that for many lay liberals the principal value of churches is that they support basic morality. This may be one reason why 96 percent of the "religious" unchurched and even 71 percent of the agnostics want their children to have a religious education. Lay liberals do not care what theological views their children embrace or whether they attend church when they grow up, but they do want them to become "good people." As far as they are concerned, the only religions beyond the pale are those that engage in such grossly anti-social acts as murder and kidnapping.

Lay liberals firmly reject the doctrine that God consigns anyone to Hell. Some find reincarnation appealing, others have only the vaguest conception of the soul's fate after death, and a few reject the idea of an afterlife altogether.

Orthodox Christian belief of one variety or other, which the fundamentalists and other conservatives in our sample espouse, seems to impel people to commit their time and other resources to a distinctively Christian regimen of witness and obedience in the company of other believers. Lay liberalism, on the other hand, is not an empowering system of belief but rather a set of conjectures concerning religious matters. It supports honesty and other moral virtues, and it encourages tolerance and civility in a pluralistic society, but it does not inspire the kind of conviction that creates strong religious communities.

One indication that lay liberalism is not an energizing "faith" is the fact that its advocates told us they rarely attempt to convert anyone to their point of view. They believe that missionaries should not try to convert people who already have a religion, and they have a strong aversion to the aggressive evangelism of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, fundamentalists, and certain Baptists. Moreover, they seldom discuss religious matters even with their family and closest friends. In the distant past, good Presbyterians held regular devotions at home and instructed their children in the Shorter Catechism. Judging from our interviews, however, in many Presbyterian families today religion is not a common topic of conversation.

Of all the various theories of mainline church decline, Dean Kelley's receives the most support from our findings. The mainline denominations do seem to be weak in the sense of being unable to generate and maintain high levels of commitment among a substantial portion of their adherents. Although we are skeptical of Kelley's argument about the relation between strictness and church growth, he is right that weak churches are in a precarious position as organizations because further weakening may diminish their members' commitments to the point of noninvolvement.

Our findings also support Kelley's contention that the mainline denominations did not suddenly become weak during the 1960s, but that their internal strength has been ebbing away for several generations. Many of our baby boomer respondents told us, for example, that they had only the vaguest idea what their own parents—or more commonly their fathers—believed, which suggests that silence on matters of faith is not new in many Presbyterian families. Moreover, we heard such reports from people whose parents attended church every Sunday. It seems likely that a significant portion of mainline Protestant parents of the 1950s did not have a deep commitment to the tenets of orthodox Christianity. Perhaps the contemporary critics of the religious "revival" of that decade were right to claim that the surge in church membership was motivated more by a desire for family "togetherness" and social respectability than by deep spiritual hunger. In many cases, the family's outward conformity was a thin shell that their children broke with ease when they left home.

What did the Presbyterian Church itself contribute to the spiritual formation of these baby boomers? For some, it contributed a great deal, especially if their parents were highly committed Christians themselves. But for many others, Sunday School, worship services, confirmation classes, and youth programs did not produce a commitment sufficiently strong to sustain itself in a milieu of family and peers in which religion was rarely mentioned. To be effective, even the best-conceived program of religious education needs the reinforcement of a rich discursive follow-up in a circle of strong believers. Two or three hours a week of "God talk" is hardly enough.

There is further evidence that the erosion of mainline Protestant strength has been a long-term process. William B. Hutchison has shown that evangelical and fundamentalist bodies have been

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growing faster than the more liberal denominations for at least seventy years. Long before membership decline set in, mainline denominational newspapers and magazines were merging or ceasing publication, Sunday and Wednesday night worship services had been abandoned, and foreign mission staffs had declined dramatically. Nationwide data gathered in the mid-1960s showed that mainline Protestants not only held less orthodox views than did evangelicals, they also attended church less frequently and had fewer close friends in their own congregations.

A survey of Presbyterian General Assembly pronouncements on social issues, which one of us (Benton Johnson) recently conducted, reveals an erosion throughout the twentieth century of official commitment to traditional Presbyterian standards of conduct. The erosion proceeded steadily and without instances of reversal, and no new standards requiring equal discipline and sacrifice were adopted in their place. Rules against worldly amusements and immodest dress went by the boards after World War I, standards for Sabbath observance were widely ignored by 1940, and in many congregations old norms concerning alcoholic beverages had become obsolete by the early 1950s. The most intriguing discovery, however, is the role the laity seems to have played in this process. A careful examination of General Assembly records suggests that the laity *chose* the course the church has taken. In other words, over the long term the erosion of old standards has been genuinely popular at the Presbyterian grass roots. The clergy and denominational elites did little or nothing to stop the process, but neither did they foist it upon the laity.

In our opinion, the mainline Protestant membership loss is simply the next stage of this process of declining commitment to the church and to Christian faith and witness. The cultural revolution of the 1960s may have hastened its onset and added to its severity, but it was not its major cause. Most conservative religious communities came through the cultural turmoil in fairly good shape; the mainline Protestant churches were already too weak to mount an effective response.

That the membership loss is only the latest evidence of a long-term trend is suggested by a similarity between the form it took in earlier times and the form it takes among our sample of Presbyterian confirmands. Earlier Presbyterians did not abandon all the old standards at once, but rather sloughed one or two at a time while retaining others. They gave up total abstinence and Sabbath observance, for example, but continued to read the Bible and go to church. By the same token, the baby boomers have retained some traces of their religious culture while abandoning others. They have reduced their churchgoing or dropped it altogether but most of them still believe in God or some spiritual force, subscribe to the basic moral code, and want their children to have a religious education. Moreover, they express no anger toward the church. They did not write bitter letters of resignation to their pastors and they do not wear T-shirts proclaiming, "Recovering Presbyterian." And although they would have no objection to their children becoming Buddhists or Mormons, their own religious "comfort zone" is surprisingly narrow and traditional. They feel more at home in a mainline Protestant church than in any other place of worship. It's simply that church does not seem very important to them.

Meanwhile, in the mainline churches themselves, the weakening process continues. Not only are a majority of our active baby boom Presbyterians lay liberals of one kind or other, on the average their level of participation is *much* lower than that of their parents when they themselves were in their teens. In fact, of all the various categories of churched and unchurched people that our study identified, only the fundamentalists reported that they attend church more frequently than their parents did. Among lay liberals, degree of church involvement has mainly to do with such mundane matters as their sex, their marital status, the presence of children, and where they live. Women, people who are married to spouses with a mainline church background, people with children at home, and people who live close to their home communities are the most likely to be involved. People who live in the West, where there are few community pressures to go to church, are the most likely to have dropped out and stayed out.

Given the reluctance of so many baby boomers to talk about religion or to instill their own views in their children, the prospects that their offspring will make a serious Christian commitment are even dimmer than their own prospects turned out to be. And among the "religious" dropouts the prospects are dimmer still. They are virtually unanimous in wanting their children to have a religious education, but less than a third with children at home have actually enrolled them in Sunday School. Many hesitate to do so for fear of getting "roped in" to a round of church activities themselves. They are "too busy," and they have a myriad of other commitments. Above all, they see no real point in getting involved.

What, if anything, can the mainline Protestant denominations do to arrest their decline? Some of them are now, for the first time in thirty years, giving high priority to new church development, and if these new programs are well-planned and well-executed the membership loss may be slowed or even reversed for a time. The largest category of likely recruits are "religious" baby boomers who dropped out of a mainline church

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when they were young but who are now married and have children at home. An appealing minister, a warm but low-keyed invitation to participate, a friendly and informal atmosphere, good child care and preschool facilities, attractive programs for young people and adults, and the presence of other families like themselves may persuade some of them to go back to church. But our data suggest that the vast majority of such prospects are lay liberals and few are likely, at least under present circumstances, to form deep commitments to the Christian faith or to the life of their new parishes. And if Bibby's Canadian findings can be extended to the United States, many "religious" dropouts will be unmoved by attempts to bring them back to church. Like their Presbyterian counterparts in our study, Bibby's Anglican dropouts were not angry at the church. But when he asked them what the church could do to attract them, the most common response was that it could do nothing.

The underlying problem of the mainline churches cannot be solved by new programs of church development alone. That problem is the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life. Somehow, in the course of the past century, these churches lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith and what it requires to a succession of younger cohorts in such a way as to command their allegiance. Admittedly, doing so has become increasingly difficult for churches as close to the very center of American culture and institutional life as the mainline denominations are. The challenges posed to Christianity by various secular ideologies and moral systems have been truly formidable in recent times. Mainline Protestants in general and Presbyterians in particular are well educated. Many of their forebears read such authors as Darwin, H. L. Mencken, and Aldous Huxley. In response to the currents of modernity, denominational leaders promoted ecumenism and dialogue, but they did not devise or promote compelling new versions of a distinctively Christian faith. They did not fashion or preach a vigorous apologetics.

In the past, the tradition from which today's mainline Protestant denominations sprang has shown a remarkable ability to reinvigorate itself in response to challenges and crises. The First and Second Great Awakenings contributed greatly to the churching of America. In recent times, the right wing of this tradition has revitalized itself in the form of modern evangelicalism. But in the twentieth century its left wing has lost the ability to mobilize the support of its vast constituency. To be sure, prohibition was enacted with the combined votes of both wings, but their dedication to temperance was a legacy from the 1800s. At the turn of our century, a small cadre of leaders from the left wing proclaimed a bold new mission for the churches, and in succeeding decades they and their increasingly numerous successors were able to enlist the support of the national assemblies and agencies of their denominations for the broad-ranging new agenda of "peace and justice" programs designed to bring about a new world order. But they were never able to persuade a substantial segment of the mainline Protestant membership to join them in this great crusade. In the meantime, their own theological uncertainty and their own embarrassment with such traditional causes as temperance and Sabbath observance made them unwitting collaborators with the process of enervation at the grass roots of their churches.

Today, a great volume of Presbyterian General Assembly pronouncements endorses their causes. Back home, a few support them and a few resist, but the majority know little and care less about the leaders' crusades. Many of them have reduced the Christian faith to belief in God and respect for Jesus and the Golden Rule, and among this group a growing proportion have little need for the church.

Perhaps some now unforeseen cultural shift will one day bring millions of baby boom dropouts back to the mainline churches. But nothing we discovered in our study suggests the likelihood of such a shift. If the mainline churches want to regain their vitality, their first step must be to address theological issues head-on. They must listen to the voices of lay liberals and provide compelling answers to the question, "What's so special about Christianity?" FT

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Nihilism and the End of Law

Phillip E. Johnson

When President Bush nominated Judge Clarence Thomas to a vacancy on the United States Supreme Court, liberals opposed to confirming the nomination at first directed critical scrutiny to statements the nominee had made in favor of employing "natural law" in constitutional interpretation. The Chairman of the Judiciary Committee that had to pass upon the nomination, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, emphasized that he too believed in the existence of natural law. Indeed, he had successfully opposed a previous Republican nominee to the Supreme Court, Judge Robert Bork, in part because Bork had denied that the Constitution protects certain "natural" rights that are not mentioned in the document itself. At that time Senator Biden had insisted that "My rights are not derived from any government. . . . My rights are because I exist. They were given to me and each of our fellow citizens by our Creator and they represent the essence of human dignity."

Senator Biden feared, however, that Judge Thomas might believe in the wrong kind of natural law. He explained the difference between good and bad natural law in a newspaper article that expanded on a theme first advanced in the *New York Times* by Harvard Law School Professor Laurence Tribe. According to Senator Biden's article, good natural law is subservient to the Constitution—i.e., to positive, man-made law—and its use is therefore restricted "to the task of giving meaning to the Constitution's great, but sometimes ambiguous, phrases." Second, good natural law does not dictate a moral code to be imposed upon individuals; instead, it protects the right of individuals to make moral decisions free from dictation by either legislators or judges. Finally, good natural law is not a static set of "timeless truths" but rather an evolving body of ideals that changes to permit government to adjust to new social challenges and new economic circumstances. In short, good natural law doesn't prevent us from doing anything we really want to do.

As a legal scholar, I had hoped Judge Thomas would accept Senator Biden's challenge and articulate a vision of natural law with real content, but this was not to be. Robert Bork had debated his legal theories with the Senators candidly, with disastrous results, and political strategists had concluded from that experience that the way to get confirmed is to say as little as possible. Judge Thomas took their advice, and stuck to a simple set of unilluminating answers when the Senators tried to probe his judicial philosophy.

The resulting stalemate illustrated the ambivalence with which our contemporary legal culture regards the proposition that there exists some objective standard of right and wrong against which human legal standards can be measured. Anyone who says that there is such a standard seems to be denying that we are morally autonomous beings who have every right to set our own standards. On the other hand, anyone who denies that there is a higher law seems to embrace nihilism, and therefore to leave the powerless unprotected from the whims of whoever controls the law-making apparatus. Either alternative is unacceptable. The safest course is to be impenetrably vague or confusing on the subject.

The Biden-Thomas exchange reflected at the partisan political level a problem that permeates the literature of legal philosophy. I call this problem the modernist impasse. Modernism is the condition that begins when humans understand that God is really dead and that they therefore have to decide all the big questions for themselves. Modernism at

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times produces an exhilarating sense of liberation: we can do whatever we like, because there is no unimpeachable authority to prevent us. Modernism at other times is downright scary: how can we persuade other people that what *they* want to do to us is barred by some unchallengeable moral absolute?

Yale Law Professor Arthur Leff expressed the bewilderment of an agnostic culture that yearns for enduring values in a brilliant lecture delivered at Duke University in 1979, a few years before his untimely death from cancer. The published lecture—titled "Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law"—is frequently quoted in law review articles, but it is little known outside the world of legal scholarship. It happens to be one of the best statements of the modernist impasse that I know. As Leff put it,

> I want to believe—and so do you—in a complete, transcendent, and immanent set of propositions about right and wrong, *findable* rules that authoritatively and unambiguously direct us how to live righteously. I also want to believe—and so do you—in no such thing, but rather that we are wholly free, not only to choose for ourselves what we ought to do, but to decide for ourselves, individually and as a species, what we ought to be. What we want, Heaven help us, is simultaneously to be perfectly ruled and perfectly free, that is, at the same time to discover the right and the good and to create it.

The heart of the problem, according to Leff, is that any normative statement implies the existence of an authoritative evaluator. But with God out of the picture, every human becomes a "godlet"—with as much authority to set standards as any other godlet or combination of godlets. For example, if a human moralist says "Thou shalt not commit adultery," he invites "the formal intellectual equivalent of what is known in barrooms and schoolyards as 'the grand sez who?'" Persons who want to commit adultery, or who sympathize with those who do, can offer the crushing rejoinder: What gives *you* the authority to prescribe what is good for *me*? As Leff explained,

> Putting it that way makes clear that if we are looking for an evaluation, we must actually be looking for an *evaluator*: some machine for the generation of judgments on states of affairs. If the evaluation is to be beyond question, then the evaluator and its evaluative processes must be similarly insulated. If it is to fulfill its role, the evaluator must be the unjudged judge, the unruled legislator, the premise maker who rests on no premises, the uncreated creator of values. . . . We are never going to get anywhere (assuming for the moment that there is somewhere to get) in ethical or legal theory unless we finally face the fact that, in the Psalmist's words, there is no one like unto the Lord. . . . The so-called death of God turns out not to have been just *His* funeral; it also seems to have effected the total elimination of any coherent, or even more-than-momentarily convincing, ethical or legal system dependent upon finally authoritative, extrasystematic premises.

Leff pointed out that it is not we who define God's utterances as unquestionably true, in the manner that we define a triangle as a three-sided plane figure. In a God-based system, God is not an idea in the human mind but a separate and controlling reality. If human reason aspires to be the judge of God's statements, it makes itself the unevaluated evaluator, which is to say it takes God's place. In Leff's words, "Our relation to God's moral order is the triangle's relationship to the order of Euclidean plane geometry, not the mathematician's. We are defined, constituted as beings whose adultery is wrong, bad, awful. Thus, committing adultery in such a system is 'naturally' bad only because the system is supernaturally constructed."

The relationship between natural law and supernatural authority requires a bit of explanation. In the philosophic tradition of Thomas Aquinas, "natural law" is distinguished from divine law because its commands are accessible to human reason even in the absence of divine revelation. To a theist like Aquinas, the reality of a moral law was not in question. The question was how much of that law we could know from natural reason (or academic philosophy), and how much we could know only from Scripture or the Church. This two-level system of reason and revelation made it possible for Aquinas to fuse the pre-Christian philosophy of Aristotle with the revelation-based doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

To a modernist, who by definition relies only upon human authority, natural law in the Thomistic sense is no longer supportable because it would have to rest upon the unacceptable premise that nature was supernaturally created. There are still plenty of people around who would like to argue that a moral code can be discerned from nature, but the modernist understanding of nature undermines their efforts. According to Judge Richard Posner, the very idea of natural law rests upon a premodern picture of nature that science has discredited.

> Even the term "natural law" is an anachronism. The majority of educated Americans

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> believe that nature is the amoral scene of Darwinian struggle. Occasional attempts are made to derive social norms from nature so conceived, but they are not likely to succeed. It is true that a variety of widely accepted norms, including the keeping of certain promises, the abhorrence of unjustified killing of human beings, and perhaps even the sanctity of property rights, promote the adaption of the human species to its environment. But so does genocide.

In other words, a certain amount of social cooperation is natural, in the Darwinian sense, because it tends to promote the survival of a tribe or kinship group. Murderous violence against outsiders is equally natural, because it promotes the spreading of one group's genes by eliminating competing genes. In fact, Darwinian natural selection is *defined* as a process by which superior varieties exterminate their inferiors, whether by attacking them directly or by competing more effectively for limited resources. It is therefore no wonder that equating what is natural with what is good—i.e., trying to derive "ought" from is—is dismissed these days as the "naturalistic fallacy."

Modernists therefore see no merit in natural law propositions about, say, sexual morality. For example, even if one grants that homosexual intercourse or abortion is in a sense less natural than heterosexual intercourse or childbirth (because it does not further reproduction), it does not follow that "unnatural" means wrong, or even undesirable. It is equally unnatural for humans to fly in airplanes, since we are not born with wings. Rejection of the naturalistic fallacy does not necessarily mean that modernists discard natural law altogether, however. As Senator Biden's article indicates, modernists are much more comfortable with the idea of natural rights than with natural obligations. Because the individual human subject—Leff's godlet—is the modernist starting point, it seems reasonable to place a heavy burden of justification upon anyone who seeks to restrain the liberty of that subject. This burden of justification is what Leff whimsically called "the grand sez who."

The assertion of rights cannot for long be separated from the imposition of duties, however. If we give X a right to do as she wants, and she wants to get an abortion, we must soon face the question of protecting her from Y, who wants to protect the rights of unborn children. If majority opinion in the legislature favors some restrictions upon abortion, and there is no specific language in the Constitution on the subject, then "pro-choice" forces have to invoke something very much like a natural law duty to get their way. "Thou shalt not interfere with a woman's right to choose abortion; indeed, thou must help to pay for abortions through tax money; more than that, thou shalt not legislate that the woman contemplating abortion must be fully informed about the potential adoptive parents who desperately want to provide a loving home for her unborn child." Sez who?

The modernist impasse, in other words, does not stymie as long as all we are doing is proclaiming liberties. The problem for modernists is how to justify imposing obligations. Homosexuals have a right to be homosexuals, of course, but do employers who disapprove have an obligation to hire them? The poor have a right to public assistance, of course, but do the more fortunate and productive citizens have a right to refuse to pay when they think the tax burden has become unreasonable? The rights of all citizens must be protected, of course, but who are the citizens? What about infants, the unborn, foreigners, and animals? Who or what has the authority to tell us whom we ought to admit to the sphere of protection?

Most of Leff's lecture consisted of a review of all the unsuccessful attempts to establish an objective moral order on a foundation of human construction, i.e., to put something else in God's place as the unevaluated evaluator. The asserted non-supernatural sources of moral authority are many and varied, and each is only temporarily convincing. They include: the command of the sovereign; the majority of the voters; the principle of utility; the Supreme Court's varying interpretations of the Constitution's great but ambiguous phrases; the subtle implications of platitudinous shared values like "equality" or "autonomy"; and even a hypothetical social contract that abstract persons might adopt in the imaginary "original position" described by John Rawls. Every alternative rests ultimately on human authority, because that is what remains when God is removed from the picture. But human authority always becomes inadequate as soon as people learn to challenge its pretensions. Every system fails the test of "the grand sez who."

Leff's lecture made a powerful impression upon a generation of legal scholars because he stated the nature of the impasse so convincingly. Most modernist thinking consists of attempts to evade the impasse with superficial resolutions. Scientific socialism can usher in a secularized Kingdom of Heaven by giving economic power to the proletariat. Criminal tendencies in individuals can be greatly reduced by providing education, psychiatric treatment, and economic opportunity. Public education can produce rational, self-controlled citizens, who can govern themselves through liberal political institutions and free markets. Scientific technology can provide abundance and health, and even eventually improve the human species itself by genetic engineering. Above all, we can still know

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what the good *is*, however difficult it may be to achieve it. Modernist philosophy teaches that when we lost God, we lost only a projection of the best that was in ourselves; what was real in that projection therefore remains, and only the illusion is gone.

Arthur Leff had a deeper understanding of what the death of God ultimately means for man. He saw modern intellectual history as a long, losing war against the nihilism implicit in modernism's rejection of the unevaluated evaluator who is the only conceivable source for ultimate premises. Leff rejected the nihilism implicit in modernism, but he also rejected the supernaturalism that he had identified as the only escape from nihilism. Here is how he concluded his 1979 lecture:

> All I can say is this: it looks as if we are all we have. Given what we know about ourselves, and each other, this is an extraordinarily unappetizing prospect; looking around the world, it appears that if all men are brothers, the ruling model is Cain and Abel. Neither reason, nor love, nor even terror, seems to have worked to make us "good," and worse than that, there is no reason why anything should. Only if ethics were something unspeakable by us could law be unnatural, and therefore unchallengeable. As things stand now, everything is up for grabs.
>
> Nevertheless:
>
> Napalming babies is bad.
>
> Starving the poor is wicked.
>
> Buying and selling each other is depraved.
>
> Those who stood up and died resisting Hitler, Stalin, Amin, and Pol Pot—and General Custer too—have earned salvation.
>
> Those who acquiesced deserve to be damned.
>
> There is in the world such a thing as evil.
>
> [All together now:] Sez who?
>
> God help us.

What Leff said is fascinating, but what he failed to say is more fascinating still. If there is no ultimate evaluator, then there is no real distinction between good and evil. It follows that if evil is nonetheless *real*, then atheism—i.e., the idea of the nonexistence of that evaluator or standard of evaluation—is not only an extraordinarily unappetizing prospect, it is also fundamentally untrue. Because the reality of evil implies the reality of the evaluator who alone has the authority to establish the standard by which evil can deserve to be damned. When impeccable logic leads to self-contradiction, there must be a faulty premise. In this case the premise is that because God is dead, "it looks as if we are all we have." Why not reexamine the premise? Why not at least explain *why* you refuse to reexamine the premise?

By not asking that last question, Leff in effect placed the death of God in the place of God. In his system, the absence of a supernatural evaluator was a premise so far beyond question that it could not be doubted even when it pointed to a conclusion Leff desperately wanted to escape, even a conclusion he acknowledged to be *false*. If we know that totalitarian mass murder is evil, and that those who acquiesced in it deserve damnation, then we know something about that absolute evaluator as well. Leff offered no reason for protecting modernism's founding premise from the brilliant skeptical analysis that he directed at everything else.* To a theist this must seem indefensible, but Leff could not have done otherwise without ceasing to be a modernist. A system's ultimate premise is always beyond question; that is what it means to say that it is an ultimate premise.

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* Arthur Leff's intellectual crisis had a strange effect upon his scholarly career. Although I never met him, I know from mutual friends that Leff's Yale Law School colleagues revered him because he combined acute critical intellect with an unusual measure of humility and sympathy. According to Yale Law Professor Charles L. Black: "If you took to Arthur a thought of yours, he always moved it along a step. He rarely 'joined issue'; it was more of his nature to give the course of shared thought a sudden turn into some new dimension—nearly always surprisingly, always revelantly. . . . I don't think I ever heard Arthur say anything cutting or unkind about anybody. There was in this no suggestion of saccharinity. It was rather, one felt, that he was wise enough either to find some reason for charity, or to have learned, from an even greater wisdom, that charity is to be practiced even if a reason does not immediately come to mind. He carried around with him the classic Chinese maxim, that the inferior person makes demands on other people, while persons of honor make demands on themselves."

This outstanding person devoted what ought to have been his most intellectually productive years to an extraordinary drudgery. According to his wife Susan, he was haunted by what I call the impasse of modernism, in her words the realization that "there is no longer a reasonably obvious set of questions that will lead one, with hard work and intelligence, to produce a good piece of scholarly work." He thought that somehow he would be better equipped to return to the philosophical quandary after undertaking some Herculean labor that would compel him to master the subject of law in its entirety, "one micron deep." And so Leff began writing a legal dictionary, at a pace so deliberate that he thought he might complete it "by the year 2075." When he died of a fast-acting cancer at the height of his intellectual powers, he had completed only the entries for the letters A, B, and C. The student-edited *Yale Law Review* devoted the entire July 1985 issue (about 400 pages) to this fragment, along with the personal tributes from which the quotations in this note are taken.

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The most interesting aspect of any argument is not what it explicitly states, but what it implicitly assumes. A rationalistic culture teaches us to think that truth is the product of a process of logical reasoning. When we are dealing with intermediate or detailed truths, which rest on more fundamental premises, this model is correct. The model breaks down, however, when we try to apply it to the fundamental premises themselves. This is because logic is a way of getting to conclusions from premises. By its very nature, a logical argument cannot justify the premises upon which it rests. When these premises are questioned, they have to be justified by a different logical argument, which rests upon different premises.

We may follow this process forever, and we will never encounter anything but another logical argument, which will itself be based upon premises. But then what is the ultimate premise, the Archimedean fulcrum on which intellect can sit and judge all the rest? If we try to answer that question by employing logic we lapse into the absurdity of circular reasoning. Reasoning has to start *somewhere*. Any attempt to justify the ultimate starting point necessarily fails, because it only establishes a different starting point. Hence, the really important step in any argument is apt to be the unexplained, unjustified, and often unstated starting point.

For example, take the rationalist philosopher who demands philosophical proofs of God's existence. From a humanistic standpoint, which finds its Archimedean point in the self-existent human mind, the demand is perfectly reasonable. But where did this mind come from, and why should we trust its philosophical ground rules? From a biblical theistic standpoint, human reason possesses a degree of reliability because God created it in His own image. When human reason denies its basis in creation, it becomes unreason. Those who have thought that they are wise in rejecting God end up as fools, carried along by every intellectual fad and approving every kind of hateful nonsense. Many people who live in modern times find this analysis confirmed every day by what they see on television and read in the newspapers. Then why is the biblical starting point out of the question for modernist intellectuals?

The primary answer is that modernist thinking assumes the validity of Darwinian evolution, which explains the origin of humans and other living systems by an entirely mechanistic process that excludes in principle any role for a Creator. In the word of the neo-Darwinist authority George Gaylord Simpson, the meaning of "evolution" is that "man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind." For modernist intellectuals, belief in evolution in precisely this sense is equated with having a scientific outlook, which is to say, with being a modernist. The price for denying "science" is to be excluded from modernist discourse altogether. That is why "it looks as if we are all we have," even if the model for "we" is Cain and Abel.

In my book *Darwin on Trial* I explained that Darwinian theory finds its basis in the philosophy of scientific naturalism rather than in an unprejudiced examination of the evidence. In other words, the theory that is itself the most important supporting pillar for the modernist system is itself supported by that very system, in a classic example of circular reasoning. If that analysis is correct, then scientific naturalism itself is the product of a faith commitment rather than an irresistible inference from the facts provided by scientific investigation. In that event, the modernist impasse may be a problem of the mind that has sold itself into captivity. Can a way out of this captivity be found in "religion"?

Not if religious thinking itself accepts the ground rules of modernism. R. Kent Greenawalt, a University Professor at Columbia University, is a distinguished legal philosopher who has tried to justify a mild theism without directly challenging the modernist definition of rationality. In Greenawalt's words: "With some uncertainty and tentativeness, I hold religious convictions; but I find myself in a pervasively secular discipline." In the 1986 Cooley Lectures at the University of Michigan Law School, Greenawalt defends a limited role for religious convictions in a jurisprudential culture whose ruling paradigm, called "liberalism," is roughly identical to what I have been calling modernism.

Some legal philosophers say that liberalism implies the exclusion of religious considerations from public life. Their reasoning is that public decisions should be made on the basis of principles and arguments accessible to all persons. This basic principle implies that common sense and science must supply all the essential factual knowledge, and that standards of ethics and justice must come from secular philosophies that rest upon uncontroversial assumptions. For example, Cornell University philosophy professor David Lyons declares that to reject the idea of "a naturalistic and public conception of political morality . . . is to deny the essential spirit of democracy." In the same spirit, Yale Law School's Bruce Ackerman writes disparagingly of those who want to restrict abortions "on the basis of some conversation with the spirit world." According to this influential version of liberalism, people who want to make public policy on the basis of some private knowledge of God are fundamentally undemocratic, because they refuse to share a common base of discourse with their fellow citizens.

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Responding to this "religion is for private life only" position, Greenawalt argues that in some circumstances citizens of a liberal/modernist state may rely upon their personal religious values in casting votes or framing arguments. Some religious citizens may have difficulty understanding why the argument even has to be made. All they have to do, after all, is invoke "the grand sez who" and then vote and argue as they like. Greenawalt concedes that citizens of a secular liberal state have a *legal* right to vote their religious convictions, but he is more concerned with when and whether they ought to exercise self-restraint in the interests of good citizenship. Model citizens do not do everything they are legally entitled to do. They do not, for example, advocate the legal subjugation of one race by another, or the establishment of a particular religion, even though such advocacy is constitutionally protected. Good citizens also decide how they will vote on rational grounds, as far as they are able. But according to modernist liberalism, religious beliefs are inherently nonrational. Does it follow that model citizens should leave their religious convictions at home (where they are relatively harmless), and base their votes and arguments concerning public questions on secular considerations only?

Greenawalt concedes that "legislation must be justified in terms of secular objectives." Nonetheless, "when people reasonably think that rational analysis and an acceptable rational secular morality cannot resolve critical questions of fact, fundamental questions of value, or the weighing of competing harms, they [may] appropriately rely on religious convictions that help them answer these questions." He assumes the modernist position that only secular reasoning can be completely rational, because he thinks that "a critical nonrational element" is always present in religious belief. The presence of such a nonrational element does not disqualify religious values from consideration in lawmaking, however. Because "rational secular morality" cannot conclusively decide such important value questions as how highly we should rate the preservation of fetal life, or how generously we should provide for the poor, legislators and judges as well as ordinary voters may with good conscience rely on their personal religious convictions to resolve such questions.

By implication, Greenawalt accepts the crucial modernist assumption that there exists a common secular rationality capable of resolving some important public issues without relying upon controversial and unprovable (i.e., nonrational) assumptions. Otherwise, the conceded distinction between "religious" and "rational secular" thinking would collapse. This is an extremely important concession: giving modernists the power to define rationality ensures that, even if "religion" is allowed a modest place in public discussion, God will continue to be effectively excluded. The reason lies in the very basis of modernist metaphysics. "Religious belief" is a real category to modernists; so is belief in fairies. All religions are equal—equally imaginary, that is. To modernists "God" is an idea in people's heads, not a reality outside of human subjectivity. As long as modernists make the rules, every godlet can undermine every theistic proposition at will by invoking the grand sez who. The culture will still be left to choose between an intolerable nihilism and continuing to chase the illusion of liberal rationalism.

At times Greenawalt seems to accept that illusion, but at other times he shows an awareness that it is an illusion. Here is how he explains his own understanding of rationality:

> I confess to considerable uncertainty about where rationality ends; but among rational convictions I include those that are apparent to anyone with ordinary rational faculties or that can be demonstrated or persuasively argued on rational grounds. Beliefs that humans have greater ethical capacities than leaves, and that love is more productive of happiness than hate, can be rationally established. An irrational conviction is contrary to what can be established on rational grounds. A nonrational conviction, in my sense, is a conviction that is not irrational but that reaches beyond what rational grounds can settle.

When a philosopher defines his central concept only in terms of itself (rational propositions are those that appeal to rational people or that can be supported on rational grounds) it is a sure sign of confusion.* Moreover, a secular rationalism that can't resolve anything more controversial than that humans have more ethical capacity than leaves is useless. The point modernist rationalism has to establish, or assume, is that a common secular rationality exists which is capable in principle of resolving the issues that actually divide people. Examining the most famous recent example of such

* When he republished his lectures in book form, Greenawalt more or less abandoned the effort to employ the categories "rational," "nonrational," and "irrational" to distinguish among belief systems. This left the basis of any principled distinction between secular and religious beliefs thoroughly mysterious. Christianity, socialism, and feminism are all alike in the sense that each has a logic of its own and attracts a wide following, while also being opposed by many well-informed and intelligent persons. See Kent Greenawalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

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a system, the rights-based liberalism of John Rawls, Greenawalt clearly recognizes that this basic modernist assumption is false.

> Recognizing that citizens in liberal societies have variant religious beliefs and ideas of the good, Rawls begins with premises that are widely shared by people who disagree on many fundamental questions. From these premises, he aspires to draw principles of justice whose acceptance allows political decisions to be made without reference to the fundamental religious and metaphysical beliefs that divide citizens. . . . Contrary to what Rawls supposes, he does not provide a theoretical basis for thinking that this ambition is either realizable or desirable.

But why then does Greenawalt build his defense of religious opinion on the assumption that this ambition is both realizable and desirable? The probable answer is that in these lectures he was addressing an audience of modernist liberal rationalists, and wanted to persuade them that even their own philosophical system had to concede at least some room for nonrational opinions on public questions, and therefore for religious opinion. Moreover, Greenawalt is a generous-minded person who understands that it is desirable to conduct public discussion on as ecumenical a basis as possible. However confused his notion of rationality may have been, his intention was to persuade his adversaries by meeting them on their own metaphysical territory.

Up to a point, this way of arguing is itself an act of good liberal citizenship. If a society is to be governed on the basis of consent rather than force, it is important that the laws make sense to as many citizens as possible. To that end, we should try to justify the laws on the least controversial basis that is available. That is why nowadays we defend Sunday closing laws (if at all) by the secular purpose of encouraging a general day of rest and recreation rather than the original purpose of honoring the Lord's Day or maximizing church attendance. In a more general sense, the courtesy we owe to fellow citizens argues for framing public questions in language that invites everyone to participate in the discussion on comfortable terms. It would be insensitive as well as ineffective, for example, for Christians to exhort their Jewish, Muslim, or agnostic neighbors about what Jesus would want us to do. On the other hand, Christians (or religious people in general) shouldn't be excluded from the political conversation either, as they would be if only agnostic opinions could count. Greenawalt's moderate and nuanced position about the proper role of religion in secular political discourse rightly addresses these questions of political good manners.

But good manners is one thing; giving away the authority to define rationality is something else altogether. Good citizens treat their neighbors' deeply held convictions with respect not because they are necessarily rational, but because they are deeply held. Standards for defining rationality are as controversial as any other assumptions. What Greenawalt accepts as "rationality" is actually the irrational assumption that we can get along very well without employing any controversial assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality. This assumption is the idol of rationalism, the faith commitment that holds the tribe together. We should perhaps treat the idol gently, because it is still very dear to many admirable people, but we should not bow down and worship it. For any genuine theist, ultimate reality must be God—not the unanchored, self-validating human mind.

Theists may be entering a time of great opportunity for affirming that understanding of reality, because the modernist idol's substance is dissolving a little more every day. In the twenty-first century, philosophy's task will be to rebuild a positive response to the human predicament that starts with the cause of that predicament, man's alienation from God. Before it can undertake the positive task, however, it must complete the critique of atheistic rationalism. On the scientific side, theists need to continue to expose the vulnerable philosophical assumptions that provide the only real support for the Darwinian theory of evolution. On the ethical and cultural side, they need to help the public as a whole to understand that the nihilism permeating contemporary life is the inevitable consequence of apostasy. King Lear's words provide the appropriate epitaph for modernism: "Nothing will come of nothing."

Secularized intellectuals have long been complacent in their apostasy because they were sure they weren't missing anything important in consigning God to the ashcan of history. They were happy to replace the Creator with a mindless evolutionary process that left humans free and responsible only to themselves. They complacently assumed that when their own reasoning power was removed from its grounding in the only ultimate reality, it could float, unsupported, on nothing at all. As modernist rationalism gives way in universities to its own natural child—postmodernist nihilism—modernists are learning very slowly what a bargain they have made. It isn't a bargain a society can live with indefinitely. FT

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Other Plans: Journal of an Illness

James Andrew Miller

I

I had spent most of Saturday, February 29, 1992, Leap Year Day, working through a stack of books and notes I was using for a major paper on Transcendentalism, due in draft at Cleveland State University in the Graduate English program. Sunday afternoon, too, was reserved for this endeavor. Sunday morning, my wife and I were planning to begin the first of a series of membership classes at a church in the greater Cleveland area we'd been attending since the fall. We had as well—I mention only to indicate priorities set for the weekend—declined coveted orchestra tickets at Severance Hall offered by a friend, and had asked to postpone dinner with another couple. There were other plans.

In my study, midnight Saturday approached. I suddenly woke up in my chair: I had fallen asleep. And, now the only one up, went through the half dreamlike routine of shutting down the house, brushing my teeth, dropping the sooner the better into islands of proper sleep. There was a no less exacting day arriving in the morning and, the several weeks ahead being the end of the quarter, an assuredly even more taxing half-month on the horizon. Sleep, as it almost always came to me, should be sweet, and nearly immediate.

Only the sleep didn't come. It didn't come by twelve-thirty. Nor by two. Nor by three. Instead, a glittering kind of pain was shooting across the lower stretches of my abdomen. It came in spasms; continued for periods of ten to fifteen seconds, then abated, only to return at intervals just short enough to prevent sleep. By four, my wife sensed something was amiss; we thought it might be the flu she had had two days before, or the Mexican meal we had eaten with such relish earlier in the evening. Whatever it was, it was no doubt sure to go away if several hours of sleep could be found.

That sleep finally came hours later. I awoke shortly after noon feeling wan but, on the whole, better. Twitches played less frequently across my lower abdomen. I split a grapefruit with my wife and drank a glass of cranberry juice. Perhaps that was all there was to it. Sleeping it—whatever it was—off, and then some fruit. I proceeded to my study. *On to Transcendentalism.*

Emerson, Thoreau, and Theodore Parker came along, surely enough, but then the spasms came too. Not continuously, but at twenty-to-thirty-minute intervals; everything was normal between them. But they too, those burning jags across the stomach, would no doubt pass, the feeling was, as the night ones had. Around four in the afternoon, my wife prepared a steaming cup of universal medicine, chicken noodle soup, and brought it to my room. I managed a quarter of it, but my taste was gone. And the spasms now came on with even greater intensity. Their duration barely varied: ten to fifteen seconds of back-arching lower abdominal pain—then nothing. As if all were normal.

This went on—reading in fifteen-minute to half-hour increments, then a ten-to-fifteen-second spasm—until nearly eight o'clock, when I finally stumbled into the next room to my wife. "Do you think it could be ulcers?" I asked. I had been toughing it out. She was much concerned; a nurse, she was afraid of obstruction somewhere in my abdomen. "I'm calling the doctor," she said.

Meanwhile the first nausea came, and vomiting. After, I felt much better. Perhaps that was all there was to it. The doctor then returned the call. My wife explained. Dr. Kent from our health plan wanted us to go immediately to the Green Road

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Urgent Care facility. They could decide from there whether to continue on to the University Hospitals' ER. My wife packed a small overnight bag, just in case.

At the Urgent Care, the appendix came under immediate suspicion; nothing suggested itself more clearly by way of diagnosis. There would have to be further tests made, the doctor there said, "And you are obviously ill." I was sent to University Hospitals to be admitted.

The spasms continued, if with less frequency. Though now, shortly after one A.M., I was a patient for only the second time in my life: the first, a two-night stay for naturally passing kidney stones in 1981. But now a fierce hiccupping began. Nausea and vomiting recurred; the hiccupping ended. I felt better. Perhaps I was cured. I fell asleep.

Monday morning dawned as test day. There was so very little Transcendental, i.e., the viewing of life as if from the stance of a god, about it. There seemed everything of the human, and reality—batteries of X-rays, EKGs, body fluids. The organism as laboratory. By the end of the day the attending surgeon, Dr. Joseph Crowe, reported that all the early diagnoses had been cleared. The day's X-rays did show some kind of blockage in the colon that only a more intrusive picture of the area could fully reveal. Those tests were scheduled for tomorrow, Tuesday.

Release this afternoon was thus foreclosed, but I was not without hope, still, for getting out, perhaps, tomorrow. For the first time, however, we called my family: it was not going to be a one-day wonder we could best tell about some days later. We could as well reassure them there was only discomfort and tests involved at this hour. I called my editor at the newspaper where a story of mine was in production, still needing attendance; he told me it would surely appear but that my health was the highest priority. And I had called the university earlier in the day to let my professors know I wouldn't be in class this evening, and perhaps not Tuesday, depending on release and how I felt, but I was hopeful about the rest of the week.

These things happen, I reminded myself. It was odd, and disconcerting, but normality would return soon enough, we, or at least I, was confident.

At just past 4 P.M., Tuesday, March 3, 1992, Dr. Crowe and four residents came into the room. There was an added measure of seriousness in the air. The doctor had the findings of the past several days, and specifically this day's. He had a paper for me to sign. He explained. They had found a tumor. A large one. High up on the left side just below the rib cage the colon had become constricted by the growth to perhaps (he showed with his fingers separated) an eighth of an inch. Surgery was imperative. Tomorrow. If things worsened, sooner. The paper—the release form—included exploratory surgery, a possible splenectomy (the spleen was just above the site), a possible colostomy. There were other possibilities, too, some listed. The gravest, however, though not listed, seemed most in mind even as I, somewhat numbly, signed. It somehow didn't seem real.

I had cancer.

Cancer!

Several days, several hours, ago I had a future.

T. S. Eliot's lines seemed to fill the room in a kind of aural antiphony: "Pray for us now and at the hour of our death, pray for us now at the hour of our death . . . "

II

I heard the somehow spectral voices of family outside the hospital room even as they were being turned away from the door, asked to wait several minutes down the hall. I was being prepped for surgery, and I was now fully in the grip of an institution: not just of a massive urban hospital but of hundreds of years of medicine. I was relating to the world and to those closest to me from a most unexpected distance, I, among creation's most uninstitutional of creatures.

Throughout the evening members from the surgical team, nurses, doctors, anesthesiologists, stopped by my bedside to introduce themselves, asking if there were questions. (Was this now standard operating procedure, I wondered, those opening up the inside chatting up the one opened up?) They were, it seemed irrefutable, uniformly sympathetic and friendly. Before the procession ended, a half-dozen gowned and soft-spoken people—people I was not, however, to recognize in the shadowy operation room (only the medical student who held my hands in hers as I sat waiting on the table's edge registered)—passed by my bedside like emissaries of another world, a world I was even now in the vestibule of, pressing inwards.

A more familiar, almost ancient, world was still waiting down the hall to see me. They had begun their eighty-mile journey to Cleveland almost on hearing the news of the afternoon. I realized yet again that I was in the grip of an institution; my emotions were somehow annealed to its corporate matter-of-factness, the incremental, inevitable, necessary next thing; I was unprepared for the emotion—my wife and others had been talking to them—as my siblings finally approached bedside, restrained though they sought to hold themselves: a brother's tremulous voice, a sister's tear-streaked face.

For the first time (something broke loose in me), I wept. But my tears were, odd perhaps, tears of sympathy. My suffering seemed less than theirs, somehow. I wished to comfort them; I sorrowed with them. It was they, I somehow felt, who were most

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in need of consoling.

But there was barely time for anything. I was soon being sent downstairs once more for a last round of pre-op X-rays. A hapless kind of processional formed in the hallway as siblings and several friends whispered encouragement, waved, as the wheelchair entered the elevator then disappeared inside. Several promised to return again early in the morning. My wife, having barely left my side since entering the hospital, stayed to see them off.

Now alone and waiting in the hallway by the X-ray room in the bowels of the quiet nighttime hospital, I was joined by another. A second porter wheeled a chair near to me. Seeing the human being set beside me I was shamed, and, for the first time somehow, frightened. The middle-aged patient's taut nose and mouth were fully masked; his head was glistening almost iridescently bald, no doubt from untold radiation; his eyes were tightly shut to the world. Upwards to ten assorted bags and packs rode above him like a vast multi-sac bladder and fed into his body through tangled capillaries of tubes. He seemed almost an appendage of them. Regal, preternaturally still, he appeared like a barely breathing mummy. His porter, I observed then, was wearing latex gloves.

Compared to this woeful seemingly skinless man I was, I felt, even in my extremity, in the pink of health. Here was not The Boy Inside the Bubble, but The Man Outside. He seemed to be sleeping, or rather, in a trance. I searched for something to say: a word of comfort, camaraderie. I was somehow there too, now, I thought. I should acknowledge him. I searched for words, but no words came. I failed. His silence silenced me. I felt a peasant near majesty in the court of suffering. His fierce, clenched eyes followed me into the X-ray room, down the hall when leaving and then to my last night's sleep before the knife.

Early next morning, my eldest sister and sister-in-law followed my wife and the transport lady on the long ride from University Hospitals' Hanna House to the portals of the operating room. Their whispered, aching, fierce endearments as the doors opened to me and closed on them again brought tears to my eyes. Their fear, their helplessness, cut me with grief. *I alone,* I told myself at the time though now know it to be less than true, *am made of sterner stuff.*

I am, however, most certainly made of a human body that all too easily can be opened up with a cut extending vertically from below the belly button to the very peak of the sternum—all without knowing: sitting on the operating table's edge I breathed deeply into a small black muzzle fitting just over the nose and mouth: five, ten, fifteen inhalations: then nothing; *nowhere* (that is, the dictionary definition: utopia), which, you later discover, lasts for fully four and one half hours. Until the voices—far-off, somehow unearthly, insistent voices—and the tattoo of pin pricks along the thigh and sides: "Can you feel this? Can you feel this?"

Your own surreal voice echoes from some ether in the present: "Ygeke. Ygeke. [Yes. Yes.]"

This is now *present* tense, things are happening *now*: when you wake up, sliver of consciousness by sliver, in your now private room (recovery room entirely lost to you), your first lucid if muffled question to the voice you recognize, your wife's: "A colostomy?"

"No."

"Ohthankgoodness! Oh . . . ! I'm living?"

"Very much so."

"Able to go home?"

"Of course. Of course. Soon enough."

The more compelling question, however, is: Will I be able to handle the larger findings of the surgery I've just passed through? What—in the doctor's jargon: Adenocarcinoma, Colon Resection with direct Anastamosis—has changed my life forever, if not prematurely ended it?

Soon enough, soon enough.

By late afternoon of March 4, 1992, I essentially know in outline what has since been fully revealed: that upwards to 50 percent of the total cancer still remains even with the softball-size tumor removed, that it has broken through the abdominal walls, that some lymph nodes are enveloped, and the liver has been encroached upon.

It is all rather serious business, the furthest removed from illusion, as the Transcendentalists would have it; sickness, death, or their prospects.

Life is no joke.

If my inauspicious birthday to this mortal coil was Christmas Eve of 1951, my worst day then was the evening of Leap Year Day 1992, onset of a second endlessly problematic round of life. Life quite unlike any I would ever have imagined for myself, though all too, even brutally, real.

Life, in a sense—my life—is starting all over again.

Even as it's threatening to end.

To coin a phrase, and even to praise: life—but another one—goes on.

III

I would be healed.

Or at least, barring that, heal as quickly as my condition allows. On Wednesday evening, hours after surgery, I stand upright beside the bed, supported by my wife and her sister. The day after, I take some steps within the room. The following day, I venture some feet up and down the hall. By Saturday, I circumambulate on my own among the chairs set at the end of each long hallway on the

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tripartite floor. I have become quite the traveler.

Sunday afternoon we have invited the nearly twenty-five nieces and nephews in my family up to the hospital. In a family with eight children, where I am the youngest of five boys and have three younger sisters, nothing quite like this has ever happened. We are a family where, until my now aged father's ailment of several years' standing, no serious illness or accident to speak of has visited. This had been true even in my childhood and youth, and now that run of almost uninterrupted health and a shielding from adversity has extended into yet another generation. My siblings tell my wife and me that their children seem quite bewildered, stunned even, by this turn of events and barely know what to make of things. An uncle gravely ill is almost fully outside their register of life.

So, we'll have a meeting.

As we are a singing family, the dining arboretum known as the Atrium at University Hospitals in Cleveland on Sunday afternoon March 8, 1992 is filled with the lifted voices of children eight to eighteen and their parents. They surround their uncle who, still with naso-gastric tube inserted and a morphine pump in place for pain at the push of a button, listens: they sing like cherubs. Forty minutes later, I ask to speak. The children gather as if circling a camp fire, their parents scattered behind them like sentries. They are very quiet.

I start by telling them that I think I understand. They are in the position I was in at their age—all of their ages. Apart from an Amish grandmother who died when I was six and a grandfather who died when I was twenty-eight, there was no death or serious illness or accident in the family I know. (We are now a clan of over forty.) The full range of suffering, reversals, calamity, and death common to the lot of all families was somehow through God's mercies temporarily suspended for us. I have no better reason why, I say, apart from mercy.

So if I couldn't fully answer their—or my—questions as to why the run of good fortune, then I could assure them that I too, through my own years, had felt that dearth of experience with close-up sorrow and loss I knew intellectually was as fundamental to life itself as—life. I knew, as we all knew, if we thought about it, and sometimes we did, the time was coming when the run would be over. Only I hadn't, I confessed, exactly pictured myself as the one to end it.

No matter; here it was, the run was definitely over, and what I could assure and reassure them of with no reservations was that what they saw before them in myself was not somehow abnormal or out of this world, or unreal, but very real, natural and normal in the affairs of men and families.

Women and men are born, they live, they enjoy, they suffer slings and arrows of both banal and outrageous fortune, they, at last, die. This is the natural rhythm of life, I tell them. Realizing the boundaries of the mortal coil is important even in understanding ourselves, knowing who we truly are. We are not little gods. We are humans—and since The Fall, subject, indeed captive, to sickness and death, every last mother's daughter and son. Thus they truly shouldn't be worried overmuch about my ailing body. Like theirs, like every other's, I tell them, it has obsolescence built into it. It's made to wear down, and out. And, early or late, it does.

It's another matter for the soul, however, I continue. It's more than mortal clay. It's made not merely for time but for eternity. That, I tell them, is the sum of things. And how we mortal humans born with immortal souls respond to Who breathed life into us—and, later, died to restore us, alienated, back to Himself—makes all the difference.

The indisputable cancer I have, I tell them, bears only on my body. My soul, my spirit, has no out-of-control cells to speak of. On that they can rest assured. I am truly in good hands, medically and every other way. Every human effort, they can be sure, is being made to fight the disease (I tell them I plan on making presidential contender Paul Tsongas who fought off lymphoma look like a malingerer), but the disease—disease itself—shouldn't be thought of as anything out of this world.

It has everything to do with this world. It is so very important for them to understand and remember that. Life, one way or other, goes on—including mine. Including theirs. Let's—I end my peroration—keep looking upward, shall we?

Whereas earlier, before the singing began, the children had been warily edging around me, unsure how to approach or what to say and catching themselves staring, the ice appears to have broken between us. I seem to have lost my dread, totemic aspect; here again is someone they know. Five of them walk with my wife and me on the long trek back from the Atrium to Hanna House to see the way the room has been decorated and the many flowers. Before they leave to join their parents, I conduct a mock interview with each of them concerning strategies for eats on the ride back, and then their goals for the rest of the evening when they get home, playing it all back to them from a microcassette player. We record much laughter.

By now I am quite tired. My wife is walking the children downstairs. I hadn't even known I was going to be giving, and certainly hadn't prepared before, a speech today. . . . My thoughts are racing even as I'm dozing off . . . when suddenly an imposing figure sweeps into the room, followed by someone unfamiliar. It's my editor. He introduces

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the second man as a doctor friend brought along "to make sure they're treating you right." They are, mostly. An hour later the publisher of the newspaper stops by, and we end up walking together, he, my wife, and I, down to the Atrium again and back, discussing news of the day, and business.

It's almost as if there has been no illness.

It's almost possible to imagine a time when there won't be any.

It's also true that I am about to fall into a twelve-hour sleep and, when I awaken, be fully four days from even leaving the hospital still, no question, a cancer patient.

Or, *im*patient.

It makes no difference. The reality remains the same.

Even as W. B. Yeats resonates of everything having changed, changed utterly.

We must wait to see if a terrible beauty has been born.

IV

We are pilgrims and strangers in a new land. Cancer does that to you. When I am released from University Hospitals in Cleveland on March 12, 1992, a week after surgery, the world no longer looks the same. There has been a transformation: nothing will ever be as it was either within the world of men and nature or within myself. Still leafless, skeletal trees stand as sentinels along the street; bee-like traffic has taken on a different rhythm; the atmosphere itself somehow seems as if of a different substance. The diaphragm consciously takes in air and breathes out. The earth is drenched with mortality.

My wife's sister drives the car that takes us home. The two have spent some portion of the past several days making, to their satisfaction, "the house ready." It does indeed look like a new home. Yet everything, though burnished, remains much as it's always been. The new hue seems to rise both from human hands and from sources beyond. Had a house ever felt so much like a home and yet like a transit station?

In the evening, while I am resting, my wife calls to Connecticut to let her aunt and uncle know. He, a much-honored Ivy League historian, has been abroad, guest of Aberdeen University in Scotland through much of February and March as lecturer in a long-standing series. His wife, it turns out, is flying to join him in the morning; she will bear the news.

Daily, the mail brings a cache of letters and cards; flowers are dropped off. I do not, as yet, have the wherewithal to do any writing, or giving out. It is others who give; I receive. I am not just a patient, but a debtor.

The thoughts and words received are humbling, restorative, and even disconcerting. I hear from expected, and unexpected, quarters. A two-year-younger fellow alum who "always looked up to you as a role model in my high school years" writes from Illinois "shocked to hear the news of your cancer," and with "sadness knowing I will probably never see you again in this life." A colleague who begins, "During the years we worked together I have come to love and respect you as a brother" assures me that "He told us, when we go through the waters He would be with us." A Liberian emigre also from the same institution writes, "I ask myself, why did this happen to good people like you, when all these wicked people are walking around town?"

These are metaphysical questions, and one discovers soon enough that with a grave illness or accident the depths are plumbed by nearly everyone; we ask ourselves, and others, the most fundamental questions. If it is indeed true that there are no atheists in foxholes (a somewhat doubtful proposition), perhaps even more true is the certainty of the metaphysician by every sick bed.

Why do we suffer? And to what ends?

Friends of ours from Cleveland make a cottage they own in the county of my birth available to us for the last ten days of March—vacation days, as it happens, for my wife, and we plan for going there. We want to think. We want to separate ourselves from everyone. We want to spend time with people. We want to be alone. We want to be with family. We are, at times, unsure of what we want.

We do know that the cottage is lovely, set back in a craggy woods all to itself. Here the skeletal trees mass like an endless thicket. Deer venture up to the wooden patio where corn has been laid to entice them. (My eldest brother arrives one morning straight from the feed mill with bulging sacks.) A menagerie of birds live their bird lives just outside the wall of glass the lodge is enclosed by. Snow limns land and tree in a gauzy hush early in the week; warm spring breaks out several days later.

When we arrive home, somehow having managed to live with all our contradictory hopes for the vacation, an air mail letter, among others, awaits us. It reads like the sum of humanity and yet is suffused with the divine. It breaks my heart.

"Dear James and Lynne, Sylvia arrived from the USA over the weekend, but our delight at being back together after too long a separation was marred by the news she brought about the cross that has been laid upon you. I cannot even attempt to explain such things, and one of the reasons I did such an unsatisfactory job when I used to try to do pastoral work is my inability to get much past the boundaries of 'past finding out' and 'incomprehensible' that the New Testament has placed against our scrutinizing what is inscrutable.

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"But of this I *am* sure: that the same mystery from which such trials come shows itself to be as well a source of strength and patience, even of joy, far beyond anything we ever dreamed of. And that is, I suppose, the ultimate meaning of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.

"It is, I'm sure, no secret to anyone that the two of you hold a special place in our hearts, as though you were our own children. With that bond between us comes the privilege also of suffering with you and weeping with you, but of sharing consolation and peace with you as you face the future.

"As a professional, Lynne, you know far better than I what can be done to battle against this disease and why it is so important not to surrender hope.

"You will both be in our thoughts and prayers. We leave for Czechoslovakia on Friday, and I'll be back in the States on the evening of the 31st. With our abiding love. . . ."

And so we begin the second life, not surrendering hope.

Dr. James K. V. Willson and his Fellow, Dr. James Sabiers, direct the treatment program I begin at University Hospitals' Ireland Cancer Center. CAT scans taken March 31, a time distant enough from the surgery for healing to allow the computer camera to reveal what cancer yet remains, reveal two tumors perched like lethal leeches on the liver. They do allow importantly, however, for monitoring: what treatment can be seen affecting visible forms can be assumed for numerous smaller tumors "seeding" the area.

After an initial five-day hospital stay, I maintain a regimen that continues to this day: a weekly round of chemotherapy (of 5-Fluorouracil, or 5-FU) as an out-patient together with thrice-weekly shots of Alpha-Interferon, a biological agent, at home. And so it will be through late June. A second CAT scan will then reveal if the leech-like forms sitting on the liver have grown, remained the same, reduced, or, *mirabile dictu*, disappeared.

The forms needn't have decreased, only remain as they were, for the treatment to be considered a success. I would then continue it.

Should the forms have grown, other therapies even more experimental will be contemplated.

If the latter, the time of my end will be that much nearer, even if hope, the blessed hope, is never surrendered.

V

You never get over the needles.

The probing, the pinching, the sense of violation.

But then, cancer is a violation. And life is a matter of scale: we tolerate things we would otherwise repulse did we not know much worse, in this case mortal illness, awaits us.

Still, you never get over the needles. Each week at the chemotherapy sessions at University Hospitals, what is called a butterfly needle is inserted into a vein at the crook of an arm. No doubt I am a timid soul, but it has yet to become easy; I blanch at each entry. I try, however, to put up a brave front. Each insertion, I know only too well, is a sluice both for drawing out the body's most vital data and for sending in its most vital treatment.

Once a vial of blood is drawn through this means, it's quickly sent to the lab. The needle remains in place, as does a large syringe. Usually within five minutes the report comes back on what are this week's counts of platelets, red blood cells, and, most importantly, white blood cells (the disease fighters). The combination of treatment being given me of chemotherapy and the biological agent Alpha Interferon is an equal opportunity destroyer of fast (and far-too-fast) growing cells. That includes blood cells, with a ten-day life cycle—and cancerous cells. The latter, by definition, out of control.

Each week becomes a kind of medical minuet between the compromising effects of the cancer treatment on the blood counts—consistently lowering them, and hence increasing vulnerability to a wide range of infections—and the favorable effects on the fastest growing cells of all, the cancerous ones: killing them.

The protocols are elaborate. If the blood counts are below a specified number, I am sent home without that week's treatment (this has happened several times). The risks are too great, my defenses too low.

Otherwise, the giant syringe still attached to the butterfly needle becomes the modem through which this week's portion of liquid chemotherapy is slowly pushed into my veins. (Nurses wear gloves—a sobering thought—in defense against what I'm ingesting.) The killer chemo goes in search of the killer cells that have given me the diagnosis of Dukes D (the most advanced of four stages of) colon cancer. Not curable, my doctors tell me, but perhaps, just perhaps, controllable.

Think of it, they tell me, like a chronic disease. Asthma, diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, for example. These and other maladies are never really cured, only, with patience and medication, controlled, managed. There is the potential for this even for my illness, advanced though it may be. If the tumors yet remaining after surgery can at least be kept from growing—their natural life—their lethality can be arrested, for however long. Life, my life, with treatment, can go on.

The first evidence of success—and hope—for this modest ambition came in late June and late August. A CAT scan each time showed that two inch-length tumors perched on the liver, the furthest advance of the mass, had grown not at all since this treatment began. *Gloria Deo.* To be sure, the tumors had

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neither shrunk nor disappeared, but even to check their growth placed me in a minority of patients with my diagnosis; this was success, they told me. Treatment should continue.

And so it shall. Life will go on. Even if knowing there is no real end to treatment in sight, both of the chemotherapy given at the hospital and the Interferon shots—needles again!—I administer to myself at home. Even if knowing, as I've been told by my doctors, that checked tumors can, over time, build up an immunity to ongoing treatment and resume growing.

Perhaps they will. Perhaps they won't.

Meanwhile, I can resume living. Not just as before—that will never be; my cancer will always exist—but much like before, only, with the added measure of mortality weighing, *much more so.*

My ambitions have been few, even singular: I have felt impelled since youth to write; scribble, scribble. Little else has motivated me.

That urge continues. These pages reflect, and have reflected, one part of my interest.

And I too have that no doubt less than Great American Novel every self-respecting journalist is said to have in a desk drawer that I'd like, between assignments, to return to. I fancy it the best thing I've done, perhaps will do.

Finally, perhaps at this late hour a straightforward statement will be permitted me: I love my wife. She has been the hero.

God has been merciful.

I'll—to appropriate Beckett in *Waiting For Godot*—I'll go on.

VI

There is a state, twilit but real, somewhere between life and death.

Those with terminal disease inhabit it. They are, for want of a better term, emigrants of the spirit. What citizenship they possess subtly shifts; the air about them somehow changes. They become alien in their own residency.

Terminal by illness places one on a febrile Ellis Island of a new and undiscovered country from whose bourn, as doleful Hamlet observes, no traveler returns.

But sail has been set, unquestionably, from the Old World; the New World awaits.

Yet this gradual, ongoing estrangement holds a profound paradox, one it might be hard to imagine short of being drawn in oneself. It comes as a point of wonder, and surprise. It makes one marvel anew at the quality of mystery in life. For even as the threads weaving one to native country of health unravel, the ties that bind to all we know and love, family, friends, coworkers, even strangers, tighten.

Or if not tighten, transform: they take on a fresh, heightened character; a nuanced dynamic quality enters every relation, from the most intimate to the marginal; complacency is effectively banished; *carpe diem*, seize the day, does not so much become an anthem of hedonism as a reminder that only the day, not the year, or the decade, or the life, is vouchsafed.

Never have tears been so near to laughter. Never the profusion of both. And never has loss and gain, longevity for depth, seemed so much of a piece, so exquisitely inextricable the one from the other.

This paradoxical, perhaps transcendent, emigre status was borne home anew by a recent CAT scan, the third set of computer pictures since March, monitoring my hereto checked tumors. Giving me the report, my doctor's voice faltered slightly on the word "unfortunately": Unfortunately, the treatment I have been on has now failed.

For five glorious months and two scans the treatment held; growth was checked. The odds, medically, had never been very long for even this.

But hope builds on hope—and success. Why shouldn't the so-far effective treatment continue to hold the pestilent, uncontrolled growths at bay? Why shouldn't a third view of the two inch-length malignant eels on a vital organ show the same arrestment as earlier views? Why? Why not?

The treatment, now, beginning in early October, has been altered. The concern all along about the chemotherapy (5-FU) has been the unavoidable effects it has had on the blood counts, seriously depressing them. These lowered counts over time forced a correspondingly reduced volume of the chemotherapy itself; these past several months, less and less has been taken.

The new, if still 5-FU-based, regimen, begun this week after a two-week hiatus allowing the counts to rise, has a new biological agent enhancer thought to be less punishing on the bone marrow than the one to date. Much higher doses of the chemotherapy are now within hope—the first full treatment has already begun.

Time will tell, certainly enough, as will the bi-monthly computer pictures monitoring.

Yet all of this, including (perhaps especially) the medical minutiae, is occurring on a somewhat surreal terrain.

The New World does take getting used to.

There is, for example, no illusion of old age. No thought of decades between now and whatever terminus might give me, and life itself, meaning. Either the meaning is now or it no doubt never will be.

There is no, or certainly fading, illusion of ever fully holding on to things. Things: not to denigrate their due place in living, but not a single item, not a book from my library, not a Mozart CD, not my gift of a lap-top computer or the vintage fountain pen made mine one Christmas morning, can accompany. It all, every single blessed thing,

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stays behind, like me to founder eventually in the dust.

There is no illusion of hanging on to any person, even the closest. We all, in the end, become separated: we had best cherish those who are near us (a gift, after all) before we do.

The night comes soon enough, in the words of One who rose from the dead, when no man can work, or love.

As I believe in the One who conquered death, who promised the like to all believing in him, the prospect of my own departure from this mortal coil does not fill me with terror.

I have hope. To be sure, I hope for more days. I love life—I've positively thrilled in it throughout this year, never cherishing it more deeply.

But it is, our human life, a being trapped in time. And time, for every single one of us, ends: sooner for some, later for others.

But ends. For all of us. Eternity extends: where, and how, we board is everything.

We are all of us, then, to that extent somewhere on an unfolding continuum between life and death.

Terminal. Between countries. Emigres.

I'm simply, perhaps mercifully, reminded. FT

Salt

Too often
Truth is out of favor
Softened
To a fault

Yet, I hold fast
To Christ—the Contrast
Who only yields
As flavor
Is revealed
By
Salt

Brother John Boyd, OSB

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Review Essay

Assassins of a Lesser God

Paul V. Mankowski

JESUS: A LIFE. By A. N. WILSON. *Norton. 269 pp. $22.95.*

LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA. By GORE VIDAL. *Random House. 225 pp. $22.*

Blasphemy is the derogation of God. To conceive of God apart from His holiness is intrinsically impossible. But to derogate God is precisely to deny His holiness. Therefore blasphemy is intrinsically impossible.

While I'm not sure the syllogism above would withstand severe logical examination, it crystallizes my own more diffuse reflections on the failure of two well-established writers in two unusually inept and ugly books, *Live From Golgotha*, by Gore Vidal, and *Jesus: A Life*, by A. N. Wilson. The first presents itself as a novel and the second as biography, but neither author makes more than a halfhearted effort at instruction or diversion. Malice is the chief motive of both works; they are written to shock, grieve, and dismay Christian believers—goals easily enough achieved, one might think, and successfully attained by talents far more meager than those of Wilson or Vidal. The really intriguing question is, why should they flop?

The answer to this question demands, paradoxically, closer scrutiny of these books than either deserves. There is a wholesome instinct that argues against granting certain works even the minimal dignity of a negative review: leave the dead to bury their dead. Yet *Jesus* and *Golgotha* have received more than polite notice in the Christian press, and have figured seriously in op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* and elsewhere. A fuller treatment is called for.

The English writer A. N. Wilson was raised as an Anglican, became a Catholic briefly, reverted to Anglicanism, and has recently announced that he is an atheist. He is a successful novelist and has won respect as a biographer of Milton, Belloc, Tolstoy, and C. S. Lewis. Religion, and the varieties of Christian churchmanship, are principal concerns in all of his work. In 1985 he published a curious essay on his tottering faith called *How Can We Know?*, a work that irresistibly brings to mind Ronald Knox's Strato in *Absolute and Abitofhell*:

> *For he, discerning with nice arguings,*
> *'Twixt non-essential and essential things,*
> *Himself believing, could no reason see*
> *Why another other should believe, but he.*

This was followed in 1990 by a tract titled *Against Religion*, in which the author declaimed, rather preciously, against religion. And now we have *Jesus*.

Wilson seems unclear himself just what sort of book he intended to write. He claims that his focus is the Jesus of history, as opposed to "the mythological Christ of religion," yet he maintains that recovery of Jesus of Nazareth is "strictly speaking impossible."

> I do tell a narrative, based on the New Testament, which would not be satisfying to the most rigorous historian. For the sake of trying to convey what I think Jesus stood for, and what sort of man he was, I adopt the New Testament order of events. I hope that I have not written fiction, but I am aware that strictly speaking we cannot say as much about Jesus as I have in the final chapters of this book without an infinity of perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.

Taken by itself, such a disclaimer might suggest a reassuring skepticism on the author's part regarding his own reconstruction. But when it suits his purposes Wilson assumes a scholarly dogmatism few real historians would hazard:

> The Fourth Gospel tells us that the [last supper] took place well before the Passover. It was not a Passover meal, and in this account there is very conspicuously no institution of the Eucharist. This is perhaps the most glaring inconsistency in the Christian claim to be an historically based religion. The truth is that even if we were to believe the fantastic claim that Jesus wished to found a new religion, with a sacramental order of bishops and deacons, we could not believe that he instituted the Eucharist at Passover time as Paul and the Gospels aver.

But what happened to "perhaps"? The careful

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reader may be pardoned in finding Wilson methodologically capricious, when not entirely opaque, in his distribution of historical probability and doubt. The following sentence, unexplained in context, is a not-untypical specimen of his mind at work: "It is true, and indeed very likely, that Jesus caused some kind of disturbance in the Temple, overthrowing the money-changers' tables, though Christian interpreters of this event are likely to have mistaken its meaning." Except for the obvious moral—*chrétiens ont tort; paiens ont raison*—I don't get it either.

In broad terms, Wilson's Jesus of history will be familiar to anyone who has read a freshman World Religions textbook. Jesus was a Galilaean *hasid* or holy man whose mission was to help Jews be better Jews. He made himself a nuisance to the Roman authorities, was executed, and was memorialized by his followers in a mythology colored by mystery religions of the East, a mythology that departed so greatly from Jesus' own Judaism that a new religion was born.

For Wilson, Christianity is the invention of St. Paul, the product of personal neurosis and demagogic genius, and a good part of his work is devoted to a reconstruction of Paul's highly peculiar role in the whole business. Though admittedly provocative, Wilson's demonstrations are crippled beyond repair by his frequent use of the fallacy called "asserting the consequent," much loved of the *Chariots of the Gods* school of history, thus: "If there were an invisible cat on that chair, it would look empty; but it does look empty, therefore there is an invisible cat on the chair." To an inattentive reader the proof may seem convincing. Watch it at work in Wilson's argument that it was Paul, not Peter, who denied Jesus at the time of his arrest.

> The Acts of the Apostles tells us that Paul was responsible for the prosecution of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, for blasphemy; but this is very unlikely to have been historically correct. If Paul was actually concerned with the condemnation, not of Stephen, but of Jesus himself, this would have been a fact with which his conscious mind, in the Christian phase of his life, would have been unable to come to terms. The Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles both draw on Christian traditions which are heavily influenced by Paul's interpretation and version of events. Their historical suppression or distortion of the truth would, if my theory is correct, correspond to the psychological suppression of the truth within Paul's own person. [A-ha!] Further, if, as Galatians makes plain, Paul held strongly divergent views from Peter, it would be natural that in the Pauline tradition, we should read accounts of Peter's denial of Jesus rather than Paul's actual condemnation of the Lord to death.

Having once threaded our way through the snarls of conditional syntax, we find that we are invited to reason thus: *If* Paul were disguising his guilt for having sold out Jesus, we wouldn't find evidence of his betrayal in the writings he influenced. But we *don't* find evidence of his betrayal in the writings he influenced, Ergo . . . The book is full of similar examples, but my favorite is Mary Magdalen's post-Resurrection boner in the Gospel of John; it was *James*, the brother of the Lord, whom she mistook for the gardener.

> As with Luke's Emmaus story, it is hard to see how someone who had known Jesus quite well should have been so slow to recognize him. If, however, the stranger were not the dear friend, but the dear friend's brother, who bore a strong resemblance, then this is just the sort of "double take" we should expect.

Several reviews of *Jesus* have remarked on the author's "scholarly approach." Rubbish. The book is emphatically, often laughably, unscholarly. Footnotes are erratic and incomplete where they do occur. The text is full of pointless pedantries (such as "The Fourth Gospel" throughout for the Gospel of John) that seldom illuminate and often obscure. Moreover, Wilson comes to the Bible innocent of Hebrew, innocent of Aramaic, and with shaky sophomore Greek, yet these handicaps don't deter him from making such claims as the following:

> One method of reconstructing the possible authenticity of Jesus' sayings is to see how they are translated from the Greek in which they are written into the Aramaic in which they must have been spoken. In Luke 17:24, for example, we read of Jesus saying, "As the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be in his day." This is not a sentence which can be rendered into feasible Aramaic, and it can therefore be rejected quite certainly as something which Jesus did not say.

Again, the inference is ludicrous. It is as if we were to reason, "My history book reports that Julius Caesar said, 'The die is cast' once he crossed the Rubicon. But Latin has no word for 'the.' Therefore it can be rejected quite certainly as something Caesar did not say."

That Wilson is not a professional scholar of Scripture does not in itself disqualify him from the task of taking a fresh approach to the person of Jesus. It is sometimes the case that a perceptive

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amateur can spot connections that elude the micro-scholars, precisely because the latter are, in a sense, too close to the data. Housman maintained famously that, if you want a really penetrating insight into Greek or Latin literature, the last person you come to is a classicist. Yet all this assumes that the one outside the guild be gifted with a logical acuity, literary perspicacity, and above all grasp of human nature great enough to outweigh any deficiency in technical knowledge. It is only fair to ask whether we have in Wilson this kind of inspired amateur. Can we trust him to recover the lost Jesus for us? The answer is given once-for-all in Wilson's argument that Jesus could not have been a carpenter, because he lacked the kind of knowledge true carpenters have.

> In one of his better-known carpentry analogies, Jesus again shows a fantastical imagination, and a sharp wit, but no practical knowledge of what it was like to work in a carpenter's shop. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" It has become a proverb to express the archetypal human tendency to be observant of other people's faults and blind to one's own. Like much that Jesus said, it is hyperbolic to the point of farce. It is actually extremely funny. But no carpenter in real life came close to having a plank sticking out of his eye. . . . Jesus, then, does not appear to have been a practical man, or one well-versed in a trade.

Wilson is not much subtler when it comes to explaining how the Gospels came to be written:

> [Matthew] has been through the [Old Testament] Scriptures cheerfully lifting details, and then inventing "facts" to fulfill the "prophecies."

Or how the fix was in on the redaction process:

> We have to accept the fact that all the documentary evidence comes to us filtered via Christian witnesses, and that Christians, after their religion became the official creed of the Roman Empire . . . busily set about destroying or altering any evidence which might conflict with the orthodox view of Jesus.

Or how the job was botched:

> Though the New Testament writers seem to have done their best to obscure Jesus altogether in an encrustation of fantasy, he won't quite be pinned down. He struggles free of the evangelists sometimes.

Those who, like Wilson, employ the stock hermeneutics of suspicion baffle us as much by their credulity as by their skepticism. On the one hand the gospel-makers are portrayed as men of almost superhuman cunning and malice, having succeeded by the end of the first century in convincing their contemporaries that their fraud, contrived to foist an authoritarian hierarchy on the community of believers, was an entirely authentic witness to Jesus. As editors, on the other hand, they were preternaturally obtuse, failing to censor all kinds of embarrassing counterevidence. Are we really meant to picture those proto-patriarchs gathered in conclave, slapping their palms to their foreheads like housewives who remember they left the iron plugged in? "Good God, man! We forgot to take out the Beatitudes!" Read Wilson on Mark 7:28:

> This saying, when taken with the other sayings of Jesus which the evangelists have forgotten to cut out . . . makes us realize that the Gospels do, in spite of themselves, contain words which are almost certainly authentic memories of his teaching.

"In spite of themselves" is good.

Flannery O'Connor once pointed out that loss of Christian faith often coincides with an "awakening" to the notion that Jesus is a *"beautiful! beautiful!"* human being: in reference to one of her friends she called it the "eeeek eeeek eureka stage." So too the newly enlightened Wilson presents himself as a defender of the true Jesus (a good-hearted Jewish liberal, respectful of women and the differently abled, with a "playful yet passionately serious sense of the infinite worth of every individual") against the arrant impostures of orthodox Catholics. Wilson's preoccupation with the Church of Rome can fairly be called obsessive; I began a list of the instances where he departs from his brief to make gratuitous polemical jabs at specifically Catholic targets, and stopped counting at twenty. Three examples from three different chapters will serve to indicate the degree of his equanimity:

> The world of Jesus has been more sharply focused for our generation than for any previous generation since 70 C.E., when his world was obliterated by the Romans, and the Catholic Faith, which had small interest in and less knowledge of Jesus' Semitic origins, pursued its own curious and in the end victorious course.

> Had [Jesus] attended the great Councils of Christendom—Nicaea, Chalcedon, Trent, or the First and Second Vatican Councils—his gratitude might have turned to dismay. . . . Even if it were even half possible that an

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> historical personage existed who said the words attributed to him in the Gospels, there could be no greater insult to his memory than to recite the creeds. . . .
>
> Would [Jesus] have been tempted to found a church, or several churches, each accusing the other of heresy, and denouncing their fellow believers by the means of councils, papal bulls, inquisitions, and wars, until the capital of the empire stood thick with temples devoted to the worship of Jesus and altars where Gentile priests could, by pronouncing certain words, call down the very presence of Jesus into their midst?

Wilson's book, be it noted, was called by the Kirkus reviewer "a surprisingly dispassionate, respectfully skeptical study that makes the best biblical scholarship available to general readers."

In *Jesus*, A. N. Wilson hoped he hadn't written a novel; in *Live from Golgotha*, Gore Vidal hoped he had. The hopes of both men are disappointed by their productions—in the former case, because an imaginative resentment could find no purchase on reality; in the latter, because a resentful imagination failed to attain the coherence of fiction.

The conceit of Vidal's book (the word "plot" cannot be applied here without irony) is, as far as I can make out, this: Jesus is a repellent twentieth-century Jewish computer analyst named Marvin Wasserstein, a fanatical Zionist and gentile-hater. The technology of time-travel is known, and Wasserstein has been able to discover Christianity's great dark secret: the man crucified on Golgotha was actually Judas, a grotesquely obese and epicene slob. St. Paul, working with his bisexual catamite St. Timothy, had concocted the story of a more presentable crucifixion victim because it would make for a more marketable new religion. The ruse worked, and Christianity was a smash hit. Wasserstein plots to take a film crew back through time to Golgotha to expose the fraud, destroy Christianity, and make the world retrospectively safe for Zionism. By a double-double-cross, Wasserstein is himself arrested at Gethsemane, is crucified *secundum scripturas*, and history proceeds unhappily ever after. Amused?

A reviewer of *Live from Golgotha* labors under the obvious handicap that virtually none of his supporting evidence is printable. Imagine the movie version of *Ben Hur* or *Quo Vadis* produced by Robert Mapplethorpe: such is the tone of sexual squalor and Greco-Roman camp pitilessly trained on the reader by Vidal's narrator Timothy. In addition, there is a continuous descant of puerile Jew-baiting poking through the frequent gaps in the narrative.

Why should such a novel, which we would hardly expect to find outside the restroom of the Camden Bus Station, warrant the attention of First Things? Because it is being discussed in deadpan earnest, by well-known intellectuals, in respected periodicals, as a legitimate contribution to the philosophy of religion. Irving Malin wrote the following lines in a review published in the Catholic weekly *Commonweal*:

> Although Vidal offers a *fiendish* gospel—a counter-gospel—he must be taken seriously. He is, after all, asking basic epistemological questions. He turns the tables on us. Why do we believe in miracles? Do we find truth by reason or faith? . . . I suggest that Vidal's provocative, distasteful novel is perhaps one of his most sustained meditations on the nature of things. It will be read for many years.

One of Vidal's blander passages (still greatly edited) may help us understand the literary context of these basic epistemological questions, this sustained meditation on the nature of things. "Saint" is St. Paul.

> So Saint went sashaying around Asia Minor, setting up churches and generally putting on a great show, aided by the cousins Barnaby and John Mark. But although the Jerusalem Jews liked the money that Saint kept sending back to headquarters, they still couldn't, in their heart of hearts, stomach the Gentiles, and so they refused to eat at the same table with us, since our [obscenity deleted] were always on their minds. Finally, things came to a head when Saint took a shine to a young convert and stud named Titus and took him down to Jerusalem for a long weekend of fun. . . . The central office then leaned on James, an employee of the Temple, and James told Saint that in the future those goyim who became converted to Jesus must be circumcised. That tore it.

And that's the clever part. It is a disturbing fact about *Live from Golgotha* that all the elements of the Weimar aesthetic are here: the sexual violence, the thrill of sacrilege, the *haute couture* androgyny, the mock-jocular anti-Semitism with its underlying rage just peeking out from the high grass of counter-cultural chic: testing, testing. Most chilling of all to this reviewer is the straight-faced seriousness (for which Vidal is not responsible) with which literary aesthetes and academics calmly convert inarticulate rage into articulate social criticism, under the fashionable pretense that any and all anger is justified, provided it is subversive. And as long as subversion remains culturally chic, of course, any objections based on traditional morality, classical

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aesthetics, or scholarly propriety can be laughed out of court as mere naive prudery. The road from Weimar to Nuremberg used to be unclear to me; it is no longer.

Vidal's novel (his twenty-third, according to the publisher) does not exhibit the marks of a mature writer, nor even the disciplined intelligence of a literary journeyman. It is utterly devoid of wit. Vulgarisms abound, but none has been sharpened by the writer into a tool; we simply have squalor for the sake of squalor. In the place of wit are a number of gags, mainly obvious anachronisms—Shirley MacLaine "channeling in" to first-century Ephesus, St. Timothy watching televised ice hockey—that suggest Mel Brooks rather than Oscar Wilde. *Live from Golgotha* reads like an adolescent's work not only in the pointlessness of its obscenity but in its general self-indulgence: the author is too angry at his characters to crack a decent joke about them, too anxious that they be ridiculed to make them halfway credible first. He starts by making Saints Paul and Peter and Jesus himself into cardboard cartoons; then he riddles his own creations with bulletholes. As a consequence, the original targets of his malice remain curiously unscathed. Listen to St. Timothy's narration concerning St. James:

> As kid brother of Jesus, [James] insisted that the leadership of the church was his, and there had been times when he acted as if he and not his brother were the messiah. Fortunately, the Resurrection settled that bit of sibling rivalry.
>
> "The presence," said James, "of non-Jews is very distressing to many members of our congregation, particularly at table where we are entirely kosher, and often dairy." . . . James was staring with disgust at my hyacinthine golden curls and cornflower-blue eyes, the perfect Gentile youth so hated by every proper, self-loving Jew. . . . We were served quite a good kosher lunch by two wealthy Jewish widows, who are known in the community as yentas, a Jewish word meaning ladies-in-waiting for the return of the messiah.
>
> "I have already deposited the Jesus-tithing from Asia Minor at the bank in the temple, to your account." Saint smiled at James, who pretended indifference. Actually James was something of a financial wizard. Where Saint could raise money through salesmanship or creative bookkeeping, not to mention the all-important Follow-up strategies, James was a master of the Temple stock exchange, which so annoyed his brother, Jesus, or so *we* say.

There are 224 pages more of the same monotonously mindless tittering. A blurb citing a puff from *Vanity Fair* commends this book as "Hilarious! A full frontal assault on the New Testament!" Assailing the New Testament does not, perhaps, prompt hilarity outside the readership of *Vanity Fair* as reflexively as it does within; yet even allowing for this, the standard of humor seems curiously low. Is it possible that the amusement the book gives such a reviewer stems less from his own reading than from his delighted anticipation of the outrage it will provoke in the bourgeois believer?

While the genres in which A. N. Wilson and Gore Vidal have dealt with the early years of Christianity are quite distinct, there are many striking similarities in their treatment. For both men, the Christian religion is an enterprise entirely unconnected with the person of Jesus; for both, it is St. Paul who concocted Christianity to serve his own ends. For both men, Paul is endowed with great rhetorical and histrionic talent that is perverted by still greater psychological defects (in this respect they could hardly succeed in shocking, for at least one Episcopalian bishop has gone public with the same view). Both men see the establishment of the Church as a simple power ploy utterly contrary to the will of Jesus; and each brings James, the brother of the Lord, into prominence in the struggles for control.

For Wilson as well as Vidal, God is a notion that is ridiculous for those who don't believe and malignant for those who do. Of course, this makes their efforts at debunking all the more strange. A man might find the claims of Sun Myung Moon preposterous; yet it would be odd if he spent most of his waking hours rebutting them. In fact, if his animus were sufficiently strong, we might begin to doubt that his disaffection was so total after all. In the same way the slurs and sneers and adolescent forays into refutation directed by Vidal and Wilson at religion are wholly out of proportion to their professed contempt for it; religion is a kind of lantern that both scorches and fascinates the fluttering moth, a moth that curses the flame yet can't free itself from its orbit. Nobler intellects than those that produced *Jesus* and *Live from Golgotha* have been trapped by the need to extinguish the source of *others'* credulity. One thinks in this connection of the master logician Georg Cantor, who, according to Bertrand Russell, spent his declining years obsessed with proving that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph of Arimathaea. That is how a critic becomes a crank: first he provokes, then perplexes, and finally bores us.

It has become fashionable for intellectuals to paint, write, or compose music as a kind of psychotherapy. Since the reception given to *Jesus* and *Live from Golgotha* has so little relation to their scholarly or literary merit, it is worth asking whether we have in these works a kind of therapeutic

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auto-shamanism. Perhaps the authors believe that if demons can be exorcised by recitation of Holy Scripture, God, conversely, might be exorcised by blasphemy, by ritual incantation of what is calculated to infuriate pious men. Perhaps they are trying to rid themselves and similarly afflicted readers of a bad-faith *dis*belief.

They fail, of course; they couldn't do otherwise. Real holiness cannot be ridiculed, only sham holiness can. Caricatures of divinity make excellent, slow-moving targets for mockery, but they are, after all, the work of men's hands. Those who mistake an image for the reality might do irreparable damage to their own handiwork, might give lasting pain to the faithful, but sooner or later they will discover to their chagrin that the source of all holiness lives on, that they were assassins of a lesser god. FT

Earthworm

Seven meters an hour, top speed,
pulling closer the edge
of asphalt you cannot

see. Mizzling rain glistens
your body stripped
to the skin. You row,

row for your life
in air thick with whirlpools
of danger. I cannot look

at you without suffering
your fragility.
There reels from the morning

sky a piece of burnt orange
paper. Death grazes among
islands of turquoise.

You defy ordinary
good sense. You defy
death. You ask so little.

Godspeed, only,
to the permeable horizon
calling like harbor lights.

William North

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Books In Review

The Last Protestant

A FAR GLORY: THE QUEST FOR FAITH IN AN AGE OF CREDULITY. By PETER L. BERGER. *Free Press. 218 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by **James Nuechterlein**

ONE SOMETIMES gets the clearest sense that a movement is in deep trouble by considering not the weakest statements of its case, but the very strongest. So it is that sympathetic readers may come to deeply melancholy conclusions as to the state of liberal Protestantism after reading Peter Berger's engaging brief for it in *A Far Glory*. Professor Berger is a sociologist possessed of uncommon common sense and he has intelligent and illuminating things to say about anything to which he turns his attention, but this Protestant reader finished *A Far Glory* persuaded, against the author's intentions, that Protestantism's glory is very remote indeed.

One arrives at this conclusion reluctantly, for there is much about Berger's argument that is congenial, even compelling. His liberal Protestantism, to begin with, is not to be associated with the desiccated Christianity of the National Council of Churches or the headquarters of the various ecclesial bodies that make up Protestantism's dwindling mainline. He has appropriately harsh things to say about the contemporary Protestant world's capitulation to the mindless relativists and the bloody-minded ideologues. His is the early-nineteenth-century's liberalism of Friedrich Schleiermacher, an "enormously courageous move" that, "focusing on religious experience rather than religious ideation as the object of theological reflection, . . . combined faith in one's own experience with faith in the God who will not abandon those who trust in Him." Berger, in other words, wants to uphold Christianity's central credal affirmations without denying modernity's legitimate claims on us.

Ours is, he insists, the condition of modernity. We have no world taken for granted, no premodern cognitive universe in which nothing other than the given is imaginable. In an increasingly rationalistic and pluralistic world that has moved us from fate to choice, we are condemned to freedom. We have learned to experience ourselves, whatever our social roles and attachments, as free individuals. Even our communities are chosen, not given. There are no longer authoritative "plausibility structures," whether in institutions or belief systems, to shape and anchor our perceptions of reality.

PRECISELY BECAUSE OF modernity's unsettling uncertainties, its relentless demands on us for choices we would rather not make and in many cases feel inadequate to make, we are tempted to flee from a relativizing freedom to the security of authoritative answers and communal solidarity. Afraid of becoming "cultural wimps," Berger suggests, we are in danger of becoming "cultural thugs." But the beguiling lures of authoritarianism—or even of neo-traditionalism and neo-orthodoxy—must be resisted; we cannot, without indulging in acts of bad faith, pretend to certainties we do not possess. Faith is not, in the ordinary sense, knowledge, and it is futile and dishonest for moderns to act as if things were otherwise.

Yet the principled refusal of dogmatism, Berger insists, need not consign us to nihilism. Pluralism is our condition, but that condition should not be construed as the denial of objective reality. In our everyday lives we have hints and signals, ordinary and extraordinary, of the existence of an order beyond the empirical. At those moments we get glimpses, in Rudolf Otto's term, of a transcendent wholly Other; we are made aware, to quote the title of an earlier Berger book, of a rumor of angels. These intuitions of transcendence, in Berger's view, are pre-ethical and pre-theoretical, and they are not themselves acts of faith. They are experiences of reality, and faith is what we make of them. It is faith that compels us to trust these experiences—rather than dismiss them as illusions in our inevitable "mornings-after"—and faith that interprets these experiences as occurrences "for me," signs "of the ultimate benignness of the universe." Here we best get the sense, Berger argues, of Luther's conception of faith as ultimate trust in the promise of God that He will not abandon His creation.

For Berger, then, the theological enterprise is best understood as a process of "induction," in which one mediates and interprets personal experience in conversation with one's religious tradition. We hold to faith, in Berger's world, without becoming obscurantists; we trust our experience without becoming religious solipsists. Reason is no more denied than it is enthroned. We are neither fideists nor skeptics. God may play hide-and-seek with us, Berger concludes, but for those who listen to the harmonies of the universe with a third ear, He leaves sufficient evidence as to His presence.

The attractions of Berger's scheme of Christian existentialism (he does not call it that) are obvious, especially for modernist intellectuals. Many of them are reluctant to conclude—as in fact many traditionalists have concluded—that any continued affirmation of Christian truth claims must require an essentially wholesale rejection of the experience of modernity. There is something undeniably bracing about Berger's willingness to face up to modernity's intimations of an absurdist abyss and yet give us good reasons to resist its claims. He acknowledges skepticism without giving in to it, and he persuades

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us that trust in God's promises need not depend on traditional—and no longer available—proofs of His existence. Berger's is in many ways a minimalist Christian proposition, but there is an at least arguable case to be made that it is all that we can with integrity sustain.

AT THE SAME time, however, *A Far Glory* offers inadvertent clues as to the reasons for Protestantism's decline. Peter Berger is a man of faith—this book offers, indeed, the most straightforward affirmation of Christian commitment he has publicly made—but observant readers will not be surprised that liberal Protestantism offers up so few other contemporary exemplars of faith and that it presents, for those without his winsome gifts, so barren a theological prospect.

There is, to begin with, the problem of Berger's—and liberal Protestantism's—emphasis on individual faith and personal experience. At one level, Berger neatly ties in the modernist preoccupation with the true and authentic self with counter-modernist transcendence. Any non-floating sense of self, he suggests, must have a fixed external referent. He appends to Dostoyevski's claim that if there is no God everything is permitted the judgment that if there is no God any self is possible. Yet in other ways his self is a quite isolated, arbitrary, and self-determining authority.

As a sociologist, Professor Berger is aware that individual religious experience cannot stand on its own. He duly notes that the original experience requires institutional support for it to be preserved, transmitted, and made plausible (as well as, in other ways, domesticated and contained). Yet Berger's treatment of the dialectical relationship between the church and the individual Christian is weighted lopsidedly on the side of the individual. One of his central chapters is entitled "The Solitary Believer," and he holds up as paradigmatic of the modern situation Simone Weil, a Jew who early in life rejected any form of Jewish identity and who, after converting to Catholicism during World War II, refused baptism, in part not to distance herself from the suffering of the Jewish people but also because "she rejected what she considered the false comforts of Catholic communalism." Berger recognizes that Weil's is an extreme case, and it is all the more striking, therefore, that he should nonetheless regard her as the paradigm for the modern believer. He concludes his discussion of the solitary believer this way:

> This, then, is the meaning I would assign to the subject of the first sentence of the Nicene Creed ["I believe in one

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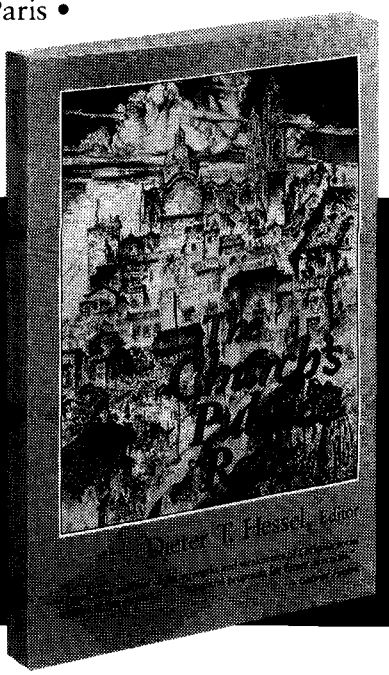

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> God"]: The solitary "I" is here affirming this belief, the "I" over and beyond all collective or communal assignments—the "I" alone with reality and alone with God. This is not to deny the importance of social ties and social locations (were I to do so, I would have to resign my commission as a sociologist). It is simply to say that, as I confront the meaning of my life, all this social world fades away to insignificance.

Berger's radically individualist understanding of religious experience, when combined with his admirable insistence on affirming traditional Christian truth claims, leaves him vulnerable to charges, if not of self-contradiction, at least of inconsistency. The experience of the totally Other, as he notes, leaves only hints and signals of the precise nature of transcendent reality. It's a long way from the ambiguous experience of transcendence, in other words, to the very specific bundle of claims made in the Nicene Creed. Most Christians acknowledge that to negotiate the journey successfully, they must posit an authoritative Church and/or an authoritative revelation. Berger explicitly rejects the authoritative Church and makes no case for (or scarcely any mention of) an authoritative revelation. He in fact raises questions of bad faith, or at least self-delusion, concerning those conservative Christians—Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics in particular—who want to specify more about the faith than, in his view, modernity allows us to do. (He is harder on Catholics than Evangelicals: many of the latter, he intimates, have not heard the news of modernity, while the former are more likely to have heard it and nonetheless chosen willfully to ignore it.)

THE PROBLEM FOR Professor Berger is that he shies from orthodoxy and traditionalism while at the same time apparently feeling comfortable with, even insisting on, the very orthodox and traditional affirmations of the Nicene Creed. Modernists of even a marginally more skeptical temper than Berger's may well have their own questions of bad faith to raise with him, while those on the other side will wonder why one who can with no apparent difficulty accept doctrines of the incarnation and resurrection should resist so vigorously the possibility of an authoritative Church. Berger's perspective remains quintessentially Protestant throughout, and many Christians who are not themselves Catholic (including not a few of us who share Berger's Lutheran tradition), will wonder at and regret his apparent lack—at least on the evidence of this book—of any catholic sympathies whatever.

The issues here are more than theoretical. Protestantism, after all, has a history, and the trajectory of its development since Schleiermacher is not such as to induce optimism concerning its future. Protestantism rejected an authoritative Church and set in its place an authoritative Scripture, and it is only in relatively recent times, after the traditional understanding of the Bible's authority became problematic, that the question of Protestantism's inherently weak ecclesiology became as critical as it now is. Protestantism today is in a general shambles, and while the liberal version of it limned in Professor Berger's pages is in all things thoughtful and in many things wise, one feels the awkward duty of pointing out that, beyond Peter Berger himself, it has virtually no known adherents.

And things are likely to get worse. The most probable product of the theological project sketched in *A Far Glory* is a genuine believer, true enough, but one inclined to view himself, as Berger seems to do, as a solitary outsider. Solitary outsiders, whatever their other virtues, are not often very good at transmitting the faith to the next generation, especially when, as in Berger's case, the question of ecclesial identity is not for them all that significant. The problem with this book, in the end, is that—if one may be forgiven the phrase—upon *this* Peter it is unlikely that any church whatever could be built.

After the Fall

THE FINAL REVOLUTION: THE RESISTANCE CHURCH AND THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM. By GEORGE WEIGEL. *Oxford University Press. 255 pp. $25.*

Reviewed by **Carl Gershman**

IT IS NOW well over three years since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. Scenes of Polish workers carrying Lech Walesa triumphantly on their shoulders, of students dancing on top of the Berlin Wall, and of throngs cheering Vaclav Havel in Wenceslas Square have been replaced by sickening images of "ethnic cleansing" in what was once Yugoslavia, and by the fear that the war in the Balkans may eventually engulf the region. The splintering of Solidarity, the breakup of Czechoslovakia, the rise of neo-Nazism in Germany are sobering troubles in a process that is still unfolding.

Given the disillusionments of the period since 1989, it is possible to lose sight of the significance of the revolution: why it happened, the stakes that were involved, and its place in the history of our civilization. This is what George Weigel seeks to recapture in *The Final Revolution*. The book is primarily an account of the role of the Catholic Church in the overthrow of Communism in Poland and Czechoslovakia. But it is also an extended essay on the nature of democracy, its relation to religion, and the evil inherent in a utopian ideology that denies the contingency of human existence.

Weigel's most important contribution to the debate about the fall

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of Communism is to place the events of the last decade in a larger moral context. His contention that the political revolution of 1989 was made possible by a prior moral and spiritual revolution is based on the view that Communism was not just another form of dictatorship. Otherwise it would be possible to interpret Communism's collapse by reference to the role of particular individuals (Mikhail Gorbachev or Ronald Reagan) or developments (the Helsinki human rights process or the economic crisis brought on everywhere the system extended its sway). Weigel rejects such interpretations because they miss the main point: that the essence of the Communist heresy was its claim of human omniscience and omnipotence. Its origin was in the millennial hope of establishing heaven on earth, and in the post-Enlightenment transference of the search for religious salvation to a political movement.

In this sense, the fall of Communism was not simply an aspect of the Democratic Revolution, no different from, say, the fall of Pinochet in Chile or of Marcos in the Philippines. It signified the end of an era of utopian ideology, and the resolution of the fundamental moral and spiritual conflict between democracy and its totalitarian negation. This is the meaning of "the final revolution" as Weigel uses the term. This interpretation doesn't mean that the closed system of Communism didn't also succumb to the revolutions in communications and technology, or to movements of workers and dissidents that drew their inspiration and motivation from sources other than, or in addition to, the Church. It does claim, however, that these other interpretations, by themselves, are too limited in that they ignore the vast historical and moral drama that was being played out and the fundamental philosophical issues that were being contested, issues having to do with human nature and the distinction between good and evil.

Such material interpretations also ignore—or underestimate—the immediate, demonstrable role of the Catholic Church, and especially Pope John Paul II, in inspiring, preparing, and mobilizing the Polish people to resist Communism. The main chapters of *The Final Revolution* explain the Church's evolving strategy of resistance, which both reflected and conditioned the changing international political environment. The "martyr cardinals," such as the Hungarian Jozsef Mindszenty and the Pole Stefan Wyszynski, were symbols of resistance to Stalinist oppression during the height of the Cold War. Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council initiated a period of dialogue with Communism based upon the view that movements could change, even if

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doctrines could not. Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Agostino Casaroli extended the policy of *Ostpolitik* in the hope of winning more "breathing space" for the Church in Eastern Europe. And then came the Polish Pope, John Paul II, whose election on October 16, 1978 marked the beginning of the end of Communism in Poland and in the rest of Eastern Europe.

The new Pope was Polish Communism's worst nightmare. As a Pole, he could address the entire Polish nation with a special power, arousing the deepest feelings of piety and patriotism and exploiting the vulnerabilities of a system he understood from the inside. He was also a modern intellectual who could challenge the Communist lie, a universalist who could expose a false universalism, and a democrat who could offer an alternative politics of human renewal and ethical clarity. Unlike his predecessor Paul VI, he rejected out of hand the Yalta system of a divided Europe, along with the assumption that Communism was a permanent fact of life in the modern world. John Paul II came to his new position not content to contain Communism but with a desire to assault its legitimacy, expose its bankruptcy, and ultimately to isolate it and assure its demise.

THE CHURCH HAD laid the groundwork for this final assault during the previous decades by fostering the recovery and reconstruction of a sense of Polish nationhood. Integral to this effort was the Great Novena, a nine-year program of national religious revival culminating in 1966 on the occasion of the millennium of Polish Catholicism. The effort also included the "Light and Life" movement of summer camps that reached hundreds of thousands of Polish youngsters, journals such as the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* that built a bridge between the Church and the lay Polish intelligentsia; and future Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki's Clubs of the Catholic Intelligentsia.

The momentum created by such initiatives was given a powerful new impetus by the election of John Paul II, whose moral leadership was complemented by an extraordinarily shrewd sense of tactics. Each step he took had a purpose, beginning with his installation, which was designed to last the exact amount of time set aside for its broadcast on Polish television, thus preventing the regime from putting its own "spin" on the event. His first pilgrimage to Poland was originally planned to coincide with the May 1979 celebration in his native Krakow of the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaw at the hands of the Polish state. This symbolism understandably alarmed the Communist regime, which refused to issue him an official invitation. In the ensuing negotiations, the Pope won a vast expansion of the scope and length of his visit in exchange for a month's postponement, thus setting the stage for the triumphant nine-day pilgrimage that aroused and inspired Polish society and led a year later to the creation of Solidarity.

This and subsequent papal visits to Poland were actually part of a global engagement by the Pope in linking the Church's mission to democratic struggles throughout the world. Samuel P. Huntington has written that "John Paul II seemed to have a way of showing up in full pontifical majesty at critical points in democratization processes" in many countries besides Poland: Brazil in June-July 1980; the Philippines in February 1981; Argentina in June 1982; Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Haiti in March 1983; Korea in May 1984; Chile in April 1987; and Paraguay in May 1988. In these and other countries that were part of what Huntington has called "the third wave" of democratic revolution, the Vatican played a crucial role, signifying an historic transformation of the Church from a bulwark of the status quo into a powerful, authentic democratic force. While the full story of this transformation has yet to be told, *The Final Revolution* tells the most important part since the revolution in Poland—a country Zbigniew Brzezinski calls a "geopolitical linchpin state"—led to the unraveling of the world's last empire.

Weigel also describes the doctrinal and philosophical transformation that paved the way for the Church's role in the democratic revolution, especially the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" adopted by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. By affirming the sanctity of the human conscience, the Declaration challenged the essence of the totalitarian state and its Leninist ideology and also, as Weigel notes, linked Catholic doctrine to democracy, the political system that most securely protects religious freedom. Weigel cautions, however, against thinking of democracy as simply a set of procedures and institutional structures, since such features of democracy are themselves grounded in a set of moral norms that transcend the political system. From this point of view, human rights cannot be legislated since they exist prior to an individual's status as a citizen. By the same token, the state cannot take them away. They are inalienable, as the Declaration of Independence says.

The linkage established between Catholicism and democracy is thus not a marriage of convenience. Democracy is to be valued not simply because its laws protect religious freedom, but because those laws implicitly acknowledge the existence of an authority that transcends the state and limits its power. It is perhaps true that with modernity has come a more formal or procedural view of democracy—a view, ironically, that is shared by the Islamic critics of the West who equate secular democracy with Godlessness. But this is a mistaken concept, and it can only be hoped that the fall of Communism, and the role of the Church and religion in that process, might rekindle in the democracies an understanding

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of the moral underpinnings of their own system.

In fact, the fall of Communism seems to have produced a quite different result. Consider, for example, the following jeremiad by Vaclav Havel, whose call for a "politics of truth" so inspired the resistance to Communism:

> Society has freed itself, true, but in some ways it behaves worse than when it was in chains. Criminality has grown rapidly, and the familiar sewage that in times of historical reversal always wells up from the nether regions of the collective psyche has overflowed into the mass media, especially the gutter press. But there are other, more serious and dangerous, symptoms: hatred among nationalities, suspicion, racism, even signs of fascism; vicious demagogy, intrigue, and deliberate lying; politicking, an unrestrained, unheeding struggle for purely particular interests, a hunger for power, unadulterated ambition, fanaticism of every imaginable kind; new and unprecedented varieties of robbery, the rise of different mafias; the general lack of tolerance, understanding, taste, moderation, reason. And, of course, there is a new attraction to ideologies, as if Marxism had left behind it a great, unsettling void that had to be filled at any cost.

Can this be what the revolution was for?

It is true, as Weigel notes, that it was Communism itself which fostered much of the fear and suspicion that surfaced after its demise. And we are only beginning to appreciate the immense difficulty of rebuilding normal societies after generations of living under a warped and oppressive totalitarian system. It is also true, as Timothy Garten Ash has written, that it is hard to make the adjustment from "living in truth" to working in half-truth. Everyday politics in a democracy is neither heroic nor inspiring, and grumbling is par for the course.

At the same time, "ethnic cleansing" is a far cry from normal politics. The death of Communism has not cleansed the world of evil any more than it has ushered in a messianic age. If we have learned anything from the anti-Communist struggle, it is that evil cannot be combatted without a vision of the good. This is Weigel's main message, one that needs to be remembered as we try to find our way in a new and troubling era.

The Scholar as Polemicist

Judaism: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow. By Hans Küng. Translated by John Bowden. *Crossroad. 753 pp. $39.50.*

Reviewed by **Alan L. Mittleman**

Readers of Catholic maverick Hans Küng's works have come to expect of him encyclopedic vol-

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umes displaying both prodigious scholarship and sharp polemic. And in these respects, the current volume does not disappoint. Weighing in at 633 pages of often infelicitously translated Germanic-Anglo text and another 120 pages of notes and apparatus, the book will prove laborious for any but lovers of either Judaism or Küng. And since, as the perceptive reader will soon discover, Küng evidently loves Judaism very little, only adulators of Küng need proceed.

The present work is the first part of a trilogy devoted to increasing understanding among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The frontispiece buoyantly declares: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions." What follows is history of religions as prophetic ministry/politics. Küng hopes to found the millennium on interfaith dialogue, grounded in both historical and theological research. The path to the end of history runs through a mutual understanding of our separate histories, an elucidation of our current theological alternatives, and a transformation of ourselves and our communities in—Küng's sovereign criterion of religious authenticity—service to "the human." The book therefore has two intended audiences: Jews and non-Jews. The latter are to be informed of Judaism's 3,000-year-old development and present condition. The former are to be challenged to reform that tradition along Küngian theological lines. The project therefore comprises both descriptive and normative dimensions. As will soon be apparent, the two cannot be disentangled.

AS A WORK of description, *Judaism* displays an impressive scope and thoroughness. Küng has digested a vast amount of current scholarship on the major aspects of Jewish intellectual, social, economic, and political history from biblical times to the Gulf War. Regardless of what one thinks of his results, the effort as such is remarkable. Moreover, Küng's sensitivity to the scholarly issues in both the history of the Jews and of Judaism results in a nuanced exposition. Despite occasional embarrassing errors of fact (Yael Dayan is *not* Moshe Dayan's son, Abba Eban was never prime minister of the State of Israel, etc.), the specialist would find Küng's treatment of many periods of Jewish history, if not necessarily persuasive, at least plausible.

Küng has organized his account of Jewish history around the model, popularized by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn, of the paradigm. In his classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn sought to show that scientific progress has not been a unilinear, cumulative discovery of truth, but rather a series of sharp, disjunctive phases in which what is discovered and interpreted depends on the epistemological/theoretical framework. Kuhn replaced, as it were, a positivistic model of science with a hermeneutic one.

As Küng employs this perspective, Judaism becomes a disjunctive series of six paradigms. Historical crises, for example the Philistine threat, bring an end to the first paradigm (tribal, decentralized Israel) and occasion another: the Israelite kingdom. Subsequent crises result in new paradigm shifts: post-exilic theocracy, classical-medieval rabbinism, modern assimilation, and postmodern statehood. What the paradigms organize are three essential constitutive elements: God, the Jewish people linked to him in covenant, and the Land. In each paradigm the set of relations among these elements changes. Different institutional, cultural, and theological constructions of these interrelated elements characterize each paradigm.

While this sounds like (and may well be) a useful and defensible methodological tool, Küng employs it for a harshly polemical purpose: the complete relativization of Jewish law. Jewish law, *halakhah*, becomes merely one transient, paradigm-dependent expression of the essential, enduring covenant. Rabbinic Judaism is an irredeemable survival from the Middle Ages, a term Küng cannot employ without using adjectives like "fanatical." Orthodox Judaism, then, is deprived of both a present and a future role in the life of the Jewish people—indeed, *any* Jewish fidelity to Jewish law at any level of observance is anathema to Küng.

This extremely deep-seated polemic against "the Law" sets the tone for Küng's entire diagnosis of Judaism. Küng is more Pauline than Paul, more Lutheran than Luther. He attacks Jewish law not only in the name of a paradigmatic history of religion, but in the name of Jesus Christ. An entire chapter is given to Küng preaching to the Jews to listen to the presumed critique of the "rabbi from Nazareth" against the false piety of "the Law." It might be argued, as Küng in fact does, that this level of dialogue-as-confrontation emerges from and makes possible real interfaith maturity. But this argument is, in Küng's case, not convincing. On the contrary, his profound hostility to the dominant mode of Jewish piety impairs his ability not only to interpret Judaism but to converse with Jews. I have no duty to listen to someone who evidently holds my way of life in contempt.

KÜNG'S HOSTILITY to classical Judaism is driven by his romantic theology, which refuses to grant any religious institutional structure authority over the human spirit. But it is also shaped by his historicism. For Küng, acknowledgment and consciousness of historicity are the hallmarks of the modern (*mutatis mutandis*, postmodern) mind. The medieval, "fundamentalist" mind—he makes no distinc-

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tion between medievals and modern fundamentalists—did not grasp this signal truth. This exclusive stress on an historical framework, which Küng presents as the cutting edge of his epistemological gospel, happens, however, to be thoroughly dated. Had he employed anthropological or phenomenological categories of analysis, categories no less "scientific" than his own, he might have been able to appreciate the enduring role that Jewish law plays in the life of the Jewish people. An anthropologist such as Mary Douglas, for instance, would find in Küng's taboo-less, humanistic Judaism a program for religious suicide. And she would be right.

Küng's own historicism finds its limit in a metahistorical truth: religion is meant to empower and serve the human. All traditions need to set aside their oppressive structures (patriarchy is one of Küng's Jewish favorites) and elevate the *humanum*. Hence the sense of his opening credo: we investigate the foundations of the religions in order to discern those essential structures that may "serve the human" while yet disposing of those dysfunctional traditions that oppress and disempower. Our criterion for making such judgments transcends the horizons of our particular faith-histories, although it does seem that Jesus' service of human beings best expresses it.

If Küng's critique were limited to classical Judaism, one might dismiss it as relevant only to thin-skinned theologians. But since the work is intended to be nothing less than a contribution to world peace, much of it is, perforce, dedicated to a political analysis of the Middle East. And predictably in that troubled part of the world, Küng finds the root of all evil in the State of Israel. He devotes one hundred pages to a sweeping indictment of everything connected with it, from early Zionism to the policies of the Shamir government (which was *still* in power when the book was completed). Given the radical nature of his self-proclaimed "prophetic" critique, it is doubtful that the recent replacement of the Likud government by a Labor-led coalition would in any way have muted his criticism.

Küng relies on revisionist Israeli scholarship, primarily the work of Simcha Flapan, secondarily that of Benny Morris, to portray Ben Gurion and other Israeli founders as cynical, Arab-hating *Realpolitiker*. Such scholarship, emanating from Israel's intellectual left during the long period of Likud dominance, seeks to deflate the heroic myths surrounding the founding of the state by deeply implicating the founding generation in the Palestinian refugee problem. Israel is tarred at birth, to use Shabtai

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Tevet's phrase, with original sin. The work of these disaffected intellectuals is highly controversial and has given rise to significant public debate both in Israel and abroad; one should perhaps not foreclose on this debate out of hand. But Küng's problem is that he uses such revisionist historiography uncritically, as if its case were self-evident. In fact, Flapan, a Marxist, is so extreme that even Morris does not accept his work. Küng treats Flapan's reading of the roots of the Palestinian problem as uncontroverted fact.

Selective (more precisely: tendentious) scholarship is used to argue that Israel can redeem itself from original sin only by ceding the territories to an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. With a keener feel for "prophetic values" than for the hardball reality of peace negotiations, Küng does at least succeed in reminding us why the prophets made such poor politicians.

This is a disturbing book. It is unfortunate that so much erudition should falter on such strong prejudice. As the much-maligned rabbis put it (in loose translation): "His virtue expires in his defects."

Fighting on Three Fronts

JEWISH POLEMICS. By ARTHUR HERTZBERG. *Columbia University Press. 259 pp. $27.95.*

Reviewed by **David Novak**

JEWISH POLEMICS is a collection of essays written over the past ten years or so by the well-known American rabbi, professor, and communal leader Arthur Hertzberg. The title of the collection is aptly chosen: anyone who has read him or who knows him will surely testify that, whether endearing or infuriating, he loves polemics.

Now the word "polemic" comes from the Greek word *polemos* meaning "war," and in this book Hertzberg is waging war on three fronts. To begin with, he is waging war with the "establishment" of the American Jewish Community—and by extension, with the former Israeli governments of Begin and Shamir, which he charges that establishment of having supported uncritically. Second, he is waging war with many of his fellow Zionists for what he takes to be their spiritual blindness. And finally, he is waging war with God—at least with the God of his father, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Hertzberg.

The first quarrel, with the leadership of organized American Jewry, is the one for which Hertzberg is best known, especially through his articles in *The New York Review of Books*, most of which are reprinted here. His main argument is that these leaders conduct their politics without the moral concerns that alone make politics more than a rationalization of power. For Hertzberg, this lack of moral appreciation seems to stem from the sad fact that, by and large, American Jews and their leaders are Jewishly illiterate. This he convincingly illustrated in his previous book, *The Jews in America*, in which he reminded us of the historical fact that the vast majority of American Jews happen to be descendents of the most ignorant stratum of *shtetl* society. When the mass immigration of Jews to America was taking place early in this century, most of the more learned Jews stayed in Europe or went to the Land of Israel, then known as Palestine. The classical literary sources of Jewish morality, therefore—in Hertzberg's view the only morality that could or should inform Jewish politics—are foreign to the Jewishly ignorant children and grandchildren (however secularly cultured) of these uncultured immigrants. (One hopes that this will begin to change as more and more children are graduated from Jewish day schools.)

PERHAPS IT IS this shallow foundation in Judaism itself that accounts for some of the influence of Begin and Shamir on American Jewish leaders: they appeared to be so much more Jewish and so much more secure in their relation to the Jewish past. One can thus appreciate the pathos of Hertzberg's quarrel with Elie Wiesel. Wiesel, like Hertzberg, has had an extensive education in both Talmud and Hasidism. Therefore, Hertzberg can find no excuse for Wiesel when the latter seems to him to be morally obtuse in the face of the harsh dealings of the Israeli government with West Bank Arabs. One can almost hear him berating Wiesel, as he claims to have berated Martin Buber for his too easy justifications of the ways of God after the Holocaust: "We must act justly, especially when such action seems imprudent or embarrassing—because there is a Jewish moral tradition."

His criticism of American Jewry for their uncritical support of Likud governments is, however, inconsistent. For he does not seem to recognize that the uncritical political liberalism of most American Jews, of which he presumably approves, stems from precisely the same Jewish ignorance. In his polemic against Jewish neoconservatives in general and Irving Kristol in particular, for instance, Hertzberg cites the Talmudic principle, "When in doubt, and the leaders confuse you by divided counsel, go into the street and see what the people are doing." But surely Arthur Hertzberg—who has been immersed in the Talmud since before I was even born, and who was a favored student of the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, one of the giants of modern Talmudic scholarship—knows perfectly well that this principle *only* applies when a point of law is being debated in a *religiously observant* Jewish community (see Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 14b; Palestinian Talmud: Pesahim 6.1/33a; cf. Mishnah: Peah

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4.1). It is thus very much like the Catholic principle of *sensus fidelium*.

Why does Hertzberg assume that the political liberalism of American Jews is any more authentically Jewish than the blind spot of many of their leaders regarding the actions of any Israeli government? Or, for that matter, than their tendency to ignore Jewish law and tradition by doing such things as intermarrying in increasingly (and alarmingly) large numbers? This is not to say that Irving Kristol's politics are any more Jewish than Arthur Hertzberg's. It is, however, to say that Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, almost certainly both more observant and Judaically learned than Irving Kristol, would be less than fully convincing should he make the claim that his politics are grounded in Judaism and are not merely the outgrowth of his secularized opinions.

This is particularly relevant to his discussion of affirmative action, an issue hotly debated in Jewish circles. Hertzberg enthusiastically endorses affirmative action. Now, it is true that there is some precedent in Jewish tradition for giving certain specific considerations to persons who have inherited economic disadvantages (see, e.g., Babylonian Talmud: Baba Metsia 70a). But that is a far cry from the claim that certain ethnic groups are to be compensated in the present for past injustices, particularly by people who were not themselves responsible for these injustices. This seems to violate the biblical prohibition of "recognition of persons in judgment" (Lev. 19:15).

It is in his polemic with his fellow Zionists that Hertzberg does argue more Jewishly and, therefore, more persuasively. He espouses the Cultural Zionism of the Russian Jewish thinker Ahad Ha'Am (d. 1927), who insisted that Zionism requires the spiritual and moral regeneration of the Jewish people and not just their return to political power. Hertzberg is very effective in showing how much more Jewishly attuned is this type of Zionism than the East European-style nationalism of Vladimir Jabotinsky (d. 1940) and his disciples Menachem Begin and Itzhak Shamir. Cultural Zionism makes claims *on* the Jewish people, even *against* the Jewish people, and not just *for* them.

Despite his great admiration for Ahad Ha'Am, however, Hertzberg is required in theological terms to admit that Ahad Ha'Am's agnosticism is an inadequate foundation for the Jewish moral and spiritual renewal Zionism should bring. At this point Hertzberg turns to the thought of the great scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem (d. 1982), who unlike Ahad Ha'Am insisted that Zionism, like

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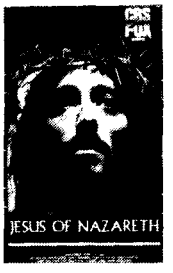

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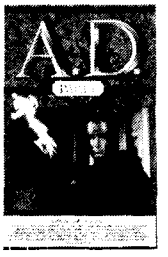

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Judaism itself, must be theocentric. Hertzberg puts himself in Scholem's school of theism—which is, to be sure, theism of a most unorthodox kind. (He also has some very powerful things to say against the rather anemic theism of another Ahad Ha'Am follower, Mordecai Kaplan [d. 1983], who was and still is an extremely influential American Jewish thinker, and who was also a teacher of Hertzberg's at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the 1940s.)

AS FOR HIS polemic with God, Hertzberg is to be credited with refusing to avoid his problem (and that of all Jews who survived the Nazis, directly or, like him, even indirectly) with the God of Israel who did not save six million of his people. Hertzberg refuses to take the easy way out of the problem, that is, into atheism or agnosticism, as did many of his contemporaries. Such an escape is too easy a solution to the problem because it avoids it rather than confronting it. Nevertheless, Hertzberg does seem to have missed the point that many American Jewish atheists and agnostics merely use the Holocaust as a rationalization for their denial of God, rather than honestly admitting that this denial is really a function of their secularism, not their suffering or their religious *angst*. He may have missed this point because in his many nontheological moments, such as when he reduces Jewish-Christian dialogue to politics, he too is influenced by the secularism that grew out of the French Revolution—more influenced than he would like to admit or than he himself knows.

Even though he has been deeply troubled by the silence of the Lord God of Israel since his Bar Mitzvah in his father's hasidic synagogue in 1934, Arthur Hertzberg has chosen to remain a believer. The expression of his existential discontents with God constitutes the most moving part of the whole book. Here Hertzberg is most compelling because here he is most Jewish. We Jews have never had an easy time with the God who chose us for the most mysterious of reasons. Our father Jacob had to "strive with God" in order to gain the name *Israel* (Gen. 32:28). We Jews are not allowed to rest; we must constantly remind God to redeem his people and his world (Isaiah 62:6-7).

If I may be so bold, I would suggest to Arthur Hertzberg that he begin his next book where this one leaves off. He should deepen the truly theological sensibilities that emerge from these polemics. Such an effort would reveal more of the Torah's truth, something that would be better for Jews and for the world than skilled polemics.

The Other Okies

RISING IN THE WEST. By DAN MORGAN. *Knopf. 532 pp. $25.*

Reviewed by **Lucky Gold**

JUST WHEN YOU thought it was safe to dismiss the American experience as a compendium of invasions, intrusions, and indiscriminate cruelties, along comes Dan Morgan to spoil the pretty, ugly picture. Correspondent for the *Washington Post* and a National Book Award nominee for *Merchants of Grain*, Morgan has delivered a compelling documentary account of an American family's journey from the Dust Bowl to the dawn of a new century. In so doing, he speaks eloquently, not of one Okie family, but of America itself.

Rising in the West invites comparison with its fictional predecessor, *The Grapes of Wrath*, but its ambitions are more modest, and yet in some ways greater, than Steinbeck's. Morgan does not set out to create a myth. Nor does he impose his own moral vision on the very real lives of people with a vision and morality of their own. To his credit, he lets them and their lives speak for themselves.

His chief protagonist, Oca Tatham, family patriarch and spiritual touchstone, is a fortunate choice of spokesman. When we first meet Oca, he is a young man with an indefinable itch—a need to escape the barren landscape of Depression-era Oklahoma and find something new, something better. Young Oca scrapes together the money for a battered old truck, gathers his disparate friends and family, and drives them across the frontier of Route 66 to California.

When Steinbeck's Okies reach the "golden land," theirs is an ironic victory. Not so Oca Tatham's. In every sense, he finds himself in California. And, simultaneously, he discovers a deep, abiding faith in God. As he rises from field laborer to horse trader, junk dealer, real estate owner, nursing home developer, multimillionaire, Oca's Pentecostal beliefs become increasingly important in his life and the life of his family. Oca Tatham appears to be one rich man who has a passing shot at getting through the eye of that needle.

It is no small achievement on Morgan's part that his tale of the Tathams also succeeds as a parallel history of Pentecostalism in America. From the origins of Pentecostalism in tiny shacks by the side of the road, where the celebrants regularly speak in tongues and the Bible is the literal roadmap of faith, to the glass cathedrals of Orange County, with their drive-in customers and hi-tech TV studios, Morgan casts an unbiased eye at a crucial, if relatively unexamined, phenomenon: the role of fundamentalism in the creation of California and, thereby, contemporary America.

IN THE 1930s, the San Joaquin Valley, where the Tathams settled, struggled, and eventually prospered, was more than just a new frontier. Morgan describes a developing nation—a polyglot of languages, cultures, and religions: Armenians, Italians, Mexicans, Filipinos; Catholics, Jews, Protestants of every denomination (and denominations within denominations), Russian Orthodox, etc. In short, the fabulously fertile land

LUCKY GOLD, *a screenwriter, is a new contributor to* FIRST THINGS.

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between Sacramento and Bakersfield represented the mosaic, the melting pot, the mess we have come to know as America.

Among all the "marginal" peoples, the Okies were the newest arrivals—the most marginal. Distrusted and disliked, they experienced the kind of prejudice that immigrants always encounter. "Okies need not apply" was standard employment practice. Even if they did find menial jobs, Okies had to work twice as hard to prove themselves. Their Oklahoma twang betrayed them, their country music stamped them, and their Pentecostal faith brought them ostracism.

In Oca's case, however, adversity only intensifies his resolve and his religion. Possessed of an innate cleverness and an endless capacity for work, Oca is able to move his family out of the fields and into the business boom of post-World War II. The embodiment of a Horatio Alger hero, he increases his wealth and his influence—in both state and church—from the days of FDR through the Reagan years. He doesn't hoard his money or his mission; he shares it instead with his sons and daughters, and their children.

The story of the Tathams (and to a lesser extent that of the Tacketts, a sort of sub-plot) is not a string of uninterrupted successes and songs of praise to the Almighty. Of the sixteen souls who started out from Oklahoma in that rickety old truck, only Oca Tatham and his immediate family found permanence and prosperity in California. The others returned to their small towns, or drifted around the fringes of the new California.

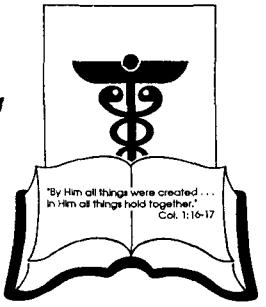
Nor has Oca himself been immune to the upheavals and heartbreaks of modern times: His children and grandchildren have suffered divorce, heretofore anathema in his tradition. He has seen members of his family seduced by the comfort and charm of California's emerging "lifestyle." He has witnessed the rise and fall of the electronic church, in which he and his family invested heavily. He endured the broken promises of politicians of both parties, on every level, from county supervisor to President.

Despite these wounds, or perhaps because of them, in Morgan's telling Oca and his people become something more than curiosities—Joads who "made good." Ultimately, they become a quintessential American family, journeying beyond the boundaries that limited Ma Joad and her dreamy son, Tom. The Tathams take us along the real "interstate," the one that runs past the New Deal and the Good War, past Selma and Woodstock, past Pat Robertson and Pete Rozelle.

Some of those bumps might have been more fully explored. Writing

AIDS/HIV
Abortion
Euthanasia
Genetic engineering
The problem of human suffering

Life at Risk:



Crises in Medical Ethics

Physician-assisted suicide
Living wills
RU-486
"Safe sex"
Other topics

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about a family whose cooperation was essential to the completion of his book, Morgan may have been overly circumspect about their involvement in such areas as the nursing home scandals, the S&L debacle, and corruption within the TV evangelical churches. Clearly, however, his purpose was not to expose, but to illuminate. He has done that, and more. By chronicling the Tathams, Dan Morgan has given us an insightful history of our own life and times.

BRIEFLY NOTED

FROM SYNAGOGUE TO CHURCH: PUBLIC SERVICES AND OFFICES IN THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. By JAMES TUNSTEAD BURTCHAELL. *Cambridge University Press. 375 pp. $59.95.*

In the tired debate whether the priesthood is of the *esse* or the *bene esse* of the Church James Burtchaell offers a provocative twist: the priesthood is of the *esse* of the Church but not of the *bene esse*. Most discussions of the historical origins of the Church's ministry confuse vitality with order. It is more reasonable, argues Burtchaell, after reviewing the ancient sources as well as the debates since the Reformation (fully half the book), to conclude that there were offices in the Church from early on but that the Church's spiritual power and energy were not found in those who held office but in people who "without community screening or authorization did God's work." He draws an illuminating contemporary comparison. "Somewhere in Calcutta today there is a parish priest whose name no reader of this book will ever hear, who will make no remembered mark on the story of the Church here or there. In his parish a frail Albanian woman in a sari is a worshiping member. From our point of view it is she who counts for most there; but Mother Teresa would surely say that it is he who presides. That we never hear of him does not mean he does not exist. But that he does exist does not mean that he is the leader and she the follower. She may lead though he presides." Wise observation that.

—Robert L. Wilken

MARTYR OF BROTHERLY LOVE: FATHER ENGELMAR UNZEITIG AND THE PRIESTS' BARRACKS AT DACHAU. By ADALBERT LUDWIG BALLING and REINHARD ABELN. *Crossroad. 117 pp. $14.95.*

One historian has called Dachau "the biggest monastery in the world," for some 3,000 clergy, 2,500 of them Catholic priests, were imprisoned there during World War II. Among them was Father Engelmar Unzeitig, a young Marianhill missionary from a German-speaking family in Moravia who spent four of his six years of priestly ministry in the notorious Bavarian concentration camp. Volunteering for nursing service in the Dachau typhus ward, he contracted the disease himself and died weeks before the camp was liberated by the Allies in 1945. His cause for beatification has been introduced; one of the authors, Father Balling, is involved as vice postulator of Father Unzeitig's case. *Martyr of Brotherly Love* is a useful introduction to a dimension of the Nazi horror that is little known in the West. The book is neither well-organized nor well-translated, but the power of Father Engelmar's self-sacrificing love, and that of many of his fellow priest-inmates, shines through nonetheless.

—George Weigel

THE DANCE WITH COMMUNITY: THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE IN AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT. By ROBERT BOOTH FOWLER. *University of Kansas Press. 210 pp. $22.95.*

"Communitarianism" is very much in vogue, and Fowler does a masterful job of examining the different, and frequently contradictory, meanings of the term. He describes himself as a proponent of "existential community," by which he suggests a very sober, one might say Augustinian, view of human possibilities and limits. He is sensibly suspicious of grand visions, especially those motored by a Rousseauean notion of national community based in common belief. Attend to the particular, says Fowler, nurture character, seek out opportunities for hospitality, and try to gentle the nastier aspects of human behavior (in yourself and others). The author has a strong appreciation of the importance of religion in public life, and this book can be warmly recommended as a help to sorting through the sometimes confusing talk and counter-talk about community.

IF I AM NOT FOR MYSELF . . . : THE LIBERAL BETRAYAL OF THE JEWS. By RUTH R. WISSE. *Free Press. 225 pp. $22.95.*

This is that rare thing, a devastating polemic delivered with literary, and human, grace. Professor of Yiddish and English at McGill, Wisse dissects the ways in which smugly assimilated Jews mindlessly embrace liberalisms that have again and again betrayed the Jews. Jews do neither themselves nor the truth any favors by being so open-minded as to blame themselves for the hostility directed against them. In the case of Israel, says Wisse, such open-mindedness could be a sure formula for suicide.

PREFERENTIAL OPTION: A CHRISTIAN AND NEOLIBERAL STRATEGY FOR LATIN AMERICA'S POOR. By AMY L. SHERMAN. *Eerdmans. 230 pp. $17.95 paper.*

An imaginative and convincing argument that moves the moral criterion of "preferential option for the poor" into the post-socialist era. Sherman, a contributor to this journal, has a rare gift of joining biblical imperatives to historical possibilities. *Preferential Option* is must reading for those who want to understand how the world's poor can be helped to help themselves.

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Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State. By Yeshayahu Leibowitz. *Harvard University Press. 291 pp. $39.95.*

The first book of essays to appear in English by a famous Jewish thinker who is always interesting and often infuriating. A contrary and contradictory man, Leibowitz is on the one hand a biochemist holding to a strictly scientific view of the world, and on the other hand an Orthodox Jew with a grimly anti-humanistic view of religion. While some regard Leibowitz as something of a prophet or a brilliant philosophical "gadfly," others think he is, in the end, simply a crank (see David Singer's "The Unmodern Jew," FT, June/July 1991).

The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica. By Dan Cohn-Sherbok. *Blackwell. 597 pp. $75 cloth, $24.95 paper.*

With 7,000 entries on all aspects of Jewish life, religion, and history—none more than a paragraph in length—this reference work has more breadth than depth. But it seems to be quite solid as far as it goes, and is very handy for quick reference—a credit to the publisher, which, in recent years, has distinguished itself by producing very fine single-volume encyclopedias and dictionaries on a variety of large subjects.

Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World. By Richard J. Mouw. *Intervarsity Press. 173pp. $14.99 cloth, $8.99 paper.*

The president of Fuller Seminary makes a convincing case that civility is—dare we use the word?—a manly virtue. It finally comes down to knowing that we are not God even as we contend relentlessly for what we discern to be God's will. We can think of so many people who need to read this book, even as we suspect most of them think it would do us a heap of good. They're probably right.

The Unholy Ghost: Anti-Catholicism in the American Experience. By Mark J. Hurley. *Our Sunday Visitor. 318 pp. $16.95.*

"Surely you exaggerate." That's a common response when concern is raised about anti-Catholic bigotry. The great merit of this book is to bring together in one place the expressions of anti-Catholicism that are accurately described as pervasive in American life, past and present. The unusual thing about this bigotry, of course, is that it is blithely tolerated and frequently perpetrated by those who most zealously demand sensitivity toward everybody except Catholics (and, be it added, fundamentalist Protestants).

A Fragrance of Oppression: The Church and its Persecutors. By Herbert Schlossberg. *Crossway. 252 pp. $11.95 paper.*

One of the most remarkable and depressing features of contemporary Christianity is the indifference of most Christians to the reality of martyrdom in this century of persecution greater than any in the

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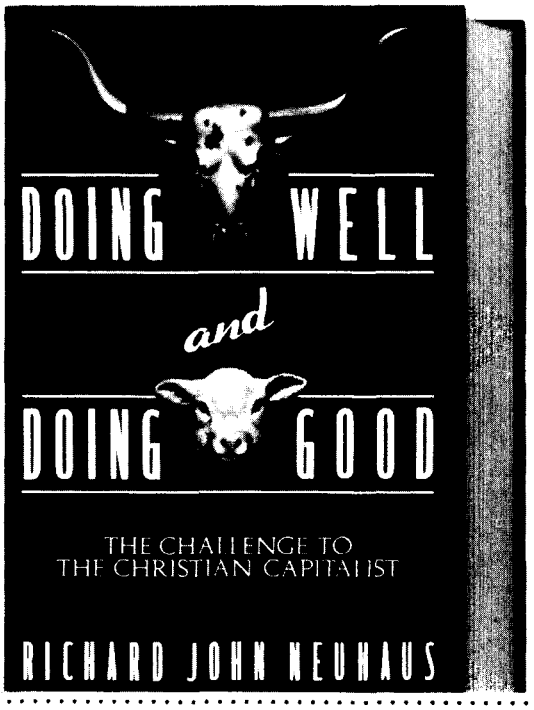

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Church's history. The reasons for this indifference—or ignorance, which may be much the same thing—are examined by Presbyterian Schlossberg with ecumenical and historical care. He urges Christians everywhere to prepare for persecution by, among other things, reaching out to those who are being persecuted now. The book is written with a sense of immediacy tempered by theological reflection and spiritual commitment.

NO LONGER EXILES: THE RELIGIOUS NEW RIGHT IN AMERICAN POLITICS. Edited by MICHAEL CROMARTIE. *University Press of America. 155 pp. $18.95 paper.*

In 1992 much of the print and broadcast media abandoned all pretense to objectivity in excoriating "the religious right." The impression given was that the American polity was threatened by an alien band of religious fanatics. Naked bigotry aside, the media bias was and is profoundly antidemocratic. Millions of Americans who are politically engaged and who make a close connection between public policy and moral judgments informed by their Christian faith are not aliens. They are a necessary, insistent, and enduring part of "We the People" from whom the legitimacy of democratic governance is derived. For reporters and other commentators on the American scene, this collection of essays is an invaluable resource. Included are some of the most respected authorities on religion and public life: George Marsden, Robert Booth Fowler, Robert Wuthnow, James Davison Hunter, Carl Henry, and George Weigel.

THE AMERICAN HOUR. By OS GUINNESS. *Free Press. 458 pp. $24.95.*

Subtitled "a time of reckoning and the once and future role of faith," this book is an urgent call to recognize that the culture wars, so to speak, go all the way down. They go down to the deepest beliefs that Americans have held, historically and at present, as the truths that vivify their audacious social experiment. Guinness, an Englishman who has lived in the U.S. for almost a decade, has a sense of the American promise that many Americans have, perhaps irretrievably, lost. *The American Hour* is part political theory, part cultural analysis,

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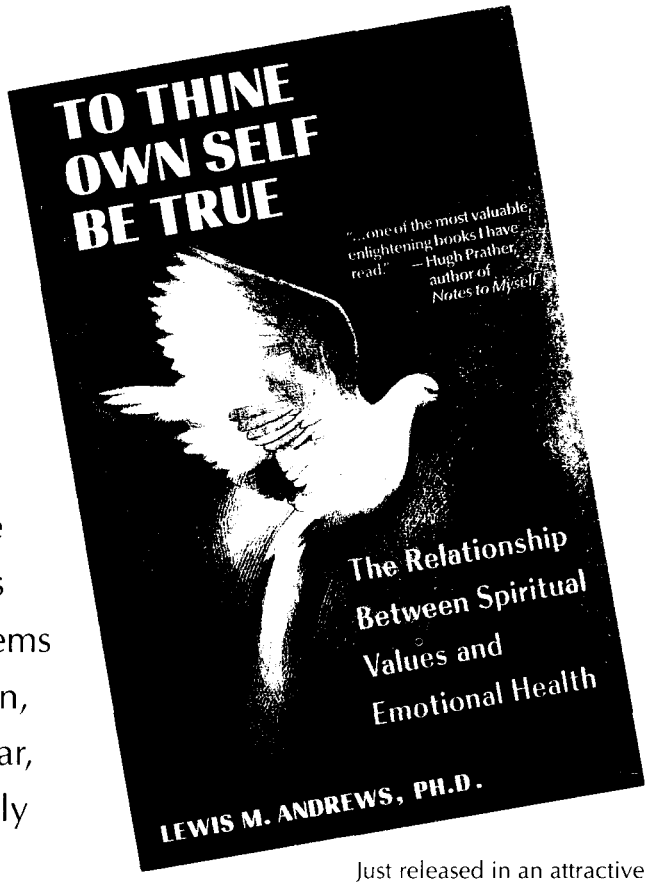
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and part a frankly revivalistic appeal for the rediscovery of the singularity of the American spirit. The author does not conceal his evangelical Protestant convictions, and these pages help explain why he is much in demand as a speaker among Christians who are not resigned to a never-ending stalemate between militant secularists and "the religious right."

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THE CRITIC AS CONSERVATOR: ESSAYS IN LITERATURE, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE. By GEORGE A. PANICHAS. *Catholic University Press. 262 pp. $49.95.*

A polemic issued from the "catacombs of the modern world." That hell-bent world, the author believes, and not without reason, is in an awful hurry to get there. Meanwhile, the few decent men remaining must cultivate the memory of what once moved our culture to aspire to greatness. Panichas is editor of the quarterly review *Modern Age.*

ENCOUNTER. By HAHN MOO-SOOK. *University of California Press. 327 pp. $45 cloth, $15 paper.*

Subtitled "a novel of 19th century Korea," this is an affecting story of Catholics who were persecuted and martyred in Korea, and of the apostates ("Judases") who betrayed them to the authorities. The genre is not exactly that of the novel, being a version of *p'ansori,* a synthesis of novel and opera in which the narrator serves as a kind of Greek chorus commenting on the moral significance of the unfolding tale. The book is an instructive introduction for Westerners to an important chapter in the development of a vibrant Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, in Korea.

THE COMPLETE ADOPTION HANDBOOK. By KAY MARSHALL STROM and DOUGLAS R. DONNELLY. *Zondervan. 287 pp. $8.99 paper.*

Pretty much what the title says it is, and deserving of a note in these pages because of the growing importance of presenting alternatives to abortion. A copy definitely belongs in the libraries of parishes and other religious agencies. Millions of Americans hoping to adopt will find it highly useful, as will those who work with women with crisis pregnancies.

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

As many readers know, Father Neuhaus underwent emergency surgery for colon cancer in January. He had prepared beforehand the items in this installment of The Public Square. He is making a strong recovery from the surgery and he, his friends, and his doctors expect that he will be fully back to work in the relatively near future.

Dr. Death Speaks

Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the retired pathologist who, as of this writing, has helped put eight women and one man to death, addressed the National Press Club. When it comes to the prudent use of body parts, he suggested, we are a wasteful society. "We use what's around us to do what we have to do. . . . But there's one natural thing we don't use, and that's death. It's so taboo. We fail to see the immorality of that. And my whole thing is aimed at that. But we've got to exploit this natural phenomenon for human betterment, and stop wasting it the way we are—and in the process of wasting it, cause immense human suffering and anguish." Dr. Kevorkian and his colleagues in the "right to die" movement can, it seems, convince themselves (and a good many others) that they are idealists.

Here is Kevorkian on another idealistic proposal: "In October of '58 I came up with a plan. At that time we were executing human beings and I came up with a plan to allow a choice for condemned criminals to die—at that time we didn't have lethal injection although I suggested we should—to die as the law stipulates or instead, at the time set for execution, we would put the prisoner under anesthesia, like we do in a hospital every day so you can't say it's grotesque or bizarre or barbaric—and the patient . . . the person would never wake up. The person gets to choose this. And if he wavers, he doesn't get the choice. And if he refuses or reneges he doesn't get the choice again. Now while he's under, I say we would do experiments on this human being that we can't do on humans today, and try to learn something profound. And the person would never wake up. Well, that was a very premature idea, I learned. I was naive, I was a young resident at the time and full of idealism. The idea was so correct I couldn't drop it and I had to propose it."

In his professional life, Kevorkian did not treat living people. As a pathologist, he studied corpses and body tissues. Death has been his life. The fact that he has been party to killing mainly women in distress does not, to date, seem to have alarmed usually alert feminists. At least in those cases where medical records are available (some of the women specified that their records were to be sealed), none of these women were terminally ill. Nor is there evidence that their pain could not have been relieved by ordinary means. They were in depression. In one instance with which we are familiar, the woman had a congenial spaghetti dinner with friends one night, and the next day called Kevorkian to help her die. Within hours, she was picked up by Kevorkian accomplices, had a taped interview with Kevorkian indicating her desire to die, and was killed.

Is it killing or suicide? The line is not clear. For those determined to take their lives, there is no shortage of ways to do it. For instance, anyone who drives can, with a slight turn of the wheel, go off a bridge, over a high cliff, or into a concrete wall. A lethal dosage of drugs is easily accumulated and self-administered. Why do these women want to go to a doctor in order to die? It seems likely that they want the soothing assurance that what they are doing is morally right, that it is not really suicide, that it is, in some perverse way, "treatment." With Dr. Death, the Dutch doctors, the Hemlock Society, and others, great evil is afoot in the exploitation of the vulnerable and confused.

In Michigan, where Dr. Death has been doing his dirty work, the legislature has now passed laws that may stop him, for a time. But public opinion polls indicate strong support for what he has done. Ever ready to accentuate the sensational, television stations play short clips of his interview with a victim, focusing on the pathos of her request to die. This is followed by Kevorkian saying that his only desire is to be of service to those in need. There then may be a clip of

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someone who protests that it is wrong to kill and to exploit the deeply distressed. But the protest is—sometimes implicitly, more often explicitly—dismissed on the news program as an attempt to impose personal or religious views on others. After all, there is the tape with Carol saying that her life is not worth living and she wants to die.

The hopeful thing is that, in Washington State and California, recent referendums favoring "assisted suicide" have been firmly defeated. At least so far, thorough public debate has turned the tide against proposals based upon the initially appealing proposition that people should be able to do what they want with their own lives. Assuming that this pattern will continue could be, quite literally, a fatal mistake. An enormous educational task is required to strengthen resistance to the seductive and ever-encroaching culture of death. Toward that end, readers may be interested in *Life at Risk*, a newsletter that describes itself as "a chronicle of euthanasia trends in America." For more information, write Mr. Richard Doerflinger, Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, 3211 4th Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20017.

FT

THE GODDESS AGAIN

Earth in the Balance, the Vice President's contribution to the literature of ecotastrophe, waxes theological at points. Mr. Gore is exquisitely sensitive to our desperate need to embrace the feminist principle in our relation to the environment. He writes that "a growing number of anthropologists and archaeomythologists argue that the prevailing ideology of belief in prehistoric Europe and much of the world was based on the worship of a single earth goddess, who was assumed to be the fount of all life and who radiated harmony among all living things. . . . [Apparently] a goddess religion was ubiquitous throughout much of the world until the antecedents of today's religions—most of which have a distinctly masculine orientation—swept out of India and the Near East, almost obliterating belief in the goddess. The last vestige of organized goddess worship was eliminated by Christianity as late as the fifteenth century in Lithuania." He does not quite lament Christianity's triumph over the goddess, but there is a wistful tone of what might have been. Of course the claim that there was a "ubiquitous" religion of the goddess is advanced by the "scholarship" of a fringe of feminists who, although relatively small in number, sometimes do seem to be ubiquitous.

In that connection, we came across the observations of one Otter Zell, founder of the Church of All Worlds in Ukiah, California. He rails against the "masculine gods" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and joins Mr. Gore in his appreciation of the goddess "who radiated harmony among all living things." Zell goes much farther, however, blaming monotheism for everything from sexual discontent to punching the hole in the ozone layer. Christianity is simply impossible. "A number of the churches have refused to ordain women, and those who have ordained women refuse to call them 'priestesses,' calling them 'priests' instead, as if they were somehow just men in drag. Only in pagan religions do priestesses exist." Mr. Zell is a little behind the curve. There are in fact Episcopalian women who are calling themselves priestesses. Of course there are those who would uncharitably say that that does not discredit his last point about such things happening only in pagan religions.

FT

MEDICAL BODY SHOPS

Here is this week's report on the high promise of experimental surgery transplanting fetal tissue in human brains. Abortion is going to turn out to be a real medical bonanza, according to this article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. "It's spectacular," says Dr. C. Warren Olanow of the University of South Florida, commenting on Swedish experiments in which infant brain tissue seemed to have helped patients with Parkinson's disease. The experiments, he said, "tell us that we are on the right track." Dr. F. Widner, who is a leader in American experiments, says that there are still problems. For example, "We need to boost the survival rate of transplanted tissue." The survival of baby parts, not the survival of babies, is a matter of urgency.

The *New York Times* account of the studies goes on: "To obtain enough tissue [Dr. Widner said], multiple abortions must be scheduled for within hours of the five-hour fetal transplant operation. He said he was reluctant to store the fetal cells in the laboratory for fear that they might not survive as well in the patient's brain. The scientists need multiple fetuses because only 10 percent of the implanted fetal cells survive." So much for those who deny that the use of fetal tissues provides a

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legitimation of abortion. Imagine the conversation with the mother. "We would like you to come in for the procedure at two o'clock on Tuesday, Joan, so that the tissue can be most useful in helping somebody who is sick." The doctor is not likely to say to the multiple candidates: "We want you women to get your abortions at the same time so that we will have a number of fresh baby brains for our transplant experiments." But that is what is really being said, and is really being done.

It is all so very seductive. Here is an editorial in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*: "As for the use of fetal tissue, the arguments against this process can be squelched by strict monitoring of donors to make sure the fetuses are not being supplied on order. But to deny their use in research to help others is like rejecting a gift." Never mind that fetuses *are* supplied on order. Never mind that this is a most curious use of "gift." If this is a gift, who is the giver? The baby who is not asked before being killed? The mother who owns the baby as chattel property? The last is the only possible answer implicit in the practice now legally established. It is an answer that some students of American history thought was precluded with the end of slavery.

FT

That Women's Pastoral Letter

"So what are you going to say about the bishops turning down the women's pastoral?" writes one obviously impatient reader. Believe it or not, we do not comment on everything. But we have followed these events carefully and talked with folk whom we take to be well-informed, and we do have some thoughts. Why did the National Conference of Catholic Bishops reject the fourth (or was it fortieth?) draft of the letter on women's concerns? Spin doctors have been working overtime on the story. According to some on the feminist left, the bishops were, in effect, indicating their unwillingness to support the Church's official position on, among other things, ordaining women to the priesthood. We are convinced that that explanation is entirely implausible.

A very small handful of bishops have publicly said that they think women's ordination should be considered "an open question." But at the November conference, bishops were lined up at the microphones to make it clear beyond doubt that they backed the official teaching. The best explanation of the vote, we believe, is that the bishops were saying that they had enough. They had had enough of a nine-year process that was misgotten in concept, mishandled in execution, and demeaning of their office. They sensed, rightly, that they were increasingly being viewed as poll-takers, deal-makers, and pacifiers of factions, rather than as teachers. Tilting first this way, then that way, and then back this way again, the process precluded serious deliberation, and the bishops weren't going to take it anymore. With the bungled pastoral out of the way, everyone might welcome a period of relative calm in which the questions that the pastoral was to address—and, more important, the question of how bishops best exercise their teaching office—can receive more careful (i.e., less politicized) consideration.

FT

More Galluping

For the last decade or so it was commonly said that there are more Muslims in America than Episcopalians. It is the kind of statement that can bring audiences to attention. But it apparently has the disadvantage of not being true. A few years ago, a national study conducted by the City University of New York reported that there are probably less than half-a-million Muslims, with perhaps half of them being black Americans. Now George Gallup confirms that, indicating that only two-tenths of one percent identify themselves as Muslims (there are somewhat over two million Episcopalians). Three-tenths of one percent of the population say they are Hindus. In recent decades, a steady 2 percent describe themselves as Jewish, although Gallup notes that in 1947 that figure was 6 percent.

As a result of new anxiety-mongering about the "religious right," the impression is spread that religion is a danger to public life. The proposition is that, the more deeply religious people are, the more likely they are to be bigoted, closed-minded, and, in general, a threat to civic peace. That, too, says Gallup, has the disadvantage of being untrue. His organization has developed a twelve-item scale to measure the segment of the population that is "highly spiritually committed." Gallup reports: "While representing only 13 percent of the populace, these persons are a 'breed apart' fron the rest of society. We find that these people, who have what might be described as a 'transforming faith,' are more tolerant of others, more inclined to perform charitable acts, more concerned about the

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betterment of society, and far happier. (These findings, in my view, are among the most exciting and significant that we have recorded in more than a half-century of polling.)" Another study by Gallup shows that 83 percent of Americans say that their religious beliefs require them to respect people of other religions. Put differently, religion is the foundation of religious tolerance. Be prepared to take cover when you try that out on the secular bigots who rail against the bigotry of religion.

FT

IN THE CASE OF ARCHBISHOP WEAKLAND

In response to those who have asked: No, we do not know how to explain the strange behavior of Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee. None of the possible explanations that come to mind are very edifying. There were, for instance, those much-publicized "listening sessions" with women, which he used to criticize what he viewed as the excessive zeal of women who work to protect the unborn. Then there was the two-part profile in *The New Yorker* in which he held his fellow bishops up to ridicule and opined that the price of his boldness is that he would never go any higher than Milwaukee. (One wonders how the Catholics of Milwaukee feel about their bishop thinking he is stuck with them.) Then this op-ed article in the *New York Times* that does not lend itself to any plausible interpretation other than advocating the ordination of women.

"The church has two options," he writes. "The first is to close the doors to all discussion on the ordination issue and accept the consequences. . . . The other is to keep the doors open to further discussion and continue the important, even if painful, dialogue between the church's tradition and modern insights." He appears to leave no doubt that the question should be open so that it can be closed in the direction that he favors. He envisions masignora with real power in the Holy See, and women diplomats representing the church in national capitals.

The *Times* op-ed page seems like a strange place for an archbishop to dissent from church teaching. But then, he would likely say this is not theological dissent. And, indeed, there is not a word of theology in the article. Christ is not mentioned once, nor is the sacramental nature of priesthood, nor is the Gospel. The article is entirely devoted to power relationships and the claim that "many women and men would say goodbye to a church they feel is out of touch with the world." The archbishop, it is to be feared, is very much in touch with the world, or at least with that part of the world that is indifferent or hostile to the Church. (The article, titled "Out of the Kitchen, Into the Vatican," is accompanied by a photograph of a priest at Mass elevating the species, with a superimposed cartoon of a woman standing on the consecrated host.)

The archbishop declares that his positions are in accord with "the vision of Vatican Council II." It is the conventional claim when advocating what is alien to the Council. Again, we do not know why the archbishop seems to be inviting the perception that he is the number one rogue elephant of the American episcopacy. Most probably, he really believes what he is saying and wants to say it as loudly as possible, perhaps to force a confrontation with Rome. In that event, his media-hyped "martyrdom" would presumably lend authenticity to his rebel posture. Only he and God know what he is up to, and only God knows for sure. But it seems very sad, contrived, and reduplicative of the many ecclesiastical minidramas staged over the last two decades. The media would love to play it again—"Modern Bishop Confronts Cranky Church"—and there is a shrinking audience of Catholic liberals and traditionalists who can never get enough of it, but one hopes that the archbishop recognizes that there are much better things to do with his undoubted talents than to star in the tired theater of Catholic delinquency of which thoughtful people have long since wearied.

FT

MORALISM'S DEADLY "CONSISTENCY"

The culture war is not between the moral and the immoral parties. Rather, there are moralities in bitter conflict. The one is a morality, typically shaped by biblical faith, based on moral truth, aspiration, and forgiveness. The other, typically irreligious or antireligious, assumes "moral truth" is an oxymoron and presses ideological claims with unforgiving rigidity. It is more aptly described as moralistic. This was brought to mind by a file of items from last fall. Readers may recall the media explosion when, in an interview, Dan Quayle said that he would still love his daughter

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even if she did the terribly wrong thing of having an abortion. Headlines declared that Quayle was "waffling" and "backtracking" on his pro-life commitment. What did the reporters expect Quayle to say? That he would disown his daughter, throw her out of the house, and never speak to her again? Yes, it was implied, that would be the appropriate reaction if he were "morally consistent." At about the same time, gay activists "outed" John Schlafly, son of Phyllis Schlafly. His mother declared, "I love my son," and the gay press, joined by what styles itself as the mainstream press, chortled over the exposure of Phyllis Schlafly's "hypocrisy." Presumably, if she were really sincere in her criticism of homosexuality, she would hate her son.

The culture war is in large part a conflict between morality and moralism. The former evidences a sense of humor, an awareness of the fragility of the human condition, a readiness to bear with one another in our imperfections, and the heart to aspire anew to the excellence of which we are capable. The moralism of the politically correct, on the other hand, is humorless, relentless, demanding, deadly. It is a glaring anomaly of our time that such moralism claims a monopoly on the term "compassion," a disposition that it cannot understand and so angrily scorns. The explanation, as the wise have been observing for centuries, is the failure to acknowledge the reality of original sin, the only Christian doctrine that is verifiable beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt. Moralistic consistency is, if we may paraphrase, the hobgoblin of little souls. The sadness is that such people cannot accept for themselves or others the forgiveness without which life is the living hell of moralistic correctness.

The conformist wisdom in our elite culture is that religion is the source of moral oppression, and much religion can be faulted on that score. The alternative often proposed is liberation from moralism that turns out to be liberation from morality. Typically, those who leave religious moralism behind are most vulnerable to the fevers of ideological moralism. None of us has perfect immunity from the infections of moralism, religious or otherwise. The only moral consistency that is not lethal begins and ends in grace. As in, for example, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." As in Quayle forgives his daughter, Schlafly forgives her son, and both, we expect, forgive those who accuse them of being morally inconsistent.

FT

Reopening Wounds

We note, with regret, that the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) have joined with the utterly predictable Americans United for Separation of Church and State in calling upon President Clinton not to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican. This is a weary dispute that goes back to the days of FDR and, many of us hoped, was finally settled by Ronald Reagan. Perhaps evangelical leaders are resuscitating it in order to demonstrate to their old-guard constituencies that the ecumenical spirit has not entirely overcome their vestigial adherence to a requisite measure of anti-Catholicism.

Whatever the reason, the appeal to Clinton is misguided in substance and form. As Catholic thinker George Weigel observes: "The Holy See occupies a distinctive place in international public life—and has done so for centuries. The historical roots of the present position of the Holy See in international law and diplomatic practice date, of course, from the days of the Papal States when the pope was a temporal ruler. Those days are happily no more. But even after the incorporation of the Papal States into a reunified Italy, the Holy See continued to exchange embassies with states, and was recognized to have a kind of *sui generis* status in international public life. That status is embodied, for example, in the representation that the Holy See maintains at a host of international organizations and agencies. It is embodied in the fact that the Holy See was a full signatory of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and has been a vigorous participant—especially on behalf of religious freedom—in CSCE forums ever since. And it is embodied in the fact that virtually every state of any consequence whatsoever in world affairs (with the sole exception of the remaining Communist powers) maintains representation at the Holy See, and receives a representative of the Holy See in turn. This exchange of embassies, by the way, has been waxing, not waning, over the past fifty years. It involves states with an established church; it involves states with no established church; it involves states that are, officially, Muslim. To view this distinctive history through the lenses of American denominationalism seems, candidly, rather shortsighted. The United States, in exchanging embassies with the Holy See, is not giving 'special recognition to the Catholic Church.' It is acknowledging the centuries-old fact that the Holy See is a reality in the world of international public life, recognized as such in customary international law."

The Baptist letter to Clinton urges that he reverse existing policy "in light of your Baptist heritage." One can imagine the public outcry—not least of all from Baptists—were Catholic bishops to urge a

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Catholic president to make policy "in light of your Catholic heritage." In addition, the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has on other questions rightly challenged the notion that the separation of church and state requires the separation of religion from public life. It is troubling that, when it comes to U.S. representation at the Holy See, evangelicals talk about "the wall of separation" in language usually associated with groups such as People for the American Way and the ACLU. We expect that President Clinton will, like the last three administrations, appoint an ambassador. We suspect that evangelical leaders who urge otherwise expect as much. We wish they had not reopened a question that reopens wounds from the days when evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics did not understand that the great public tasks of our day must be addressed together.

FT

COUNTING ANTI-SEMITES

Sorry, we know that some of you are tired of the subject, but in this kind of world anti-Semitism is a question of continuing importance. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has once again taken a survey that it first used in 1964 and reports that at present 20 percent of Americans are anti-Semitic. How do they arrive at that conclusion? Anti-Semitism is measured by the response to eleven propositions. Those who say "probably true" to six or more are counted as anti-Semitic.

The eleven propositions are: (1) Jews stick together more than other Americans; (2) Jews always like to be at the head of things; (3) Jews are more loyal to Israel than America; (4) Jews have too much power in the U.S. today; (5) Jews have too much control and influence on Wall Street; (6) Jews have too much power in the business world; (7) Jews have a lot of irritating faults; (8) Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want; (9) Jewish businessmen are so shrewd that others don't have a fair chance in competition; (10) Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind; (11) Jews are not as honest as other businessmen.

The measurement is questionable on several scores. Seven of the assertions are undoubtedly negative. Assertions 4, 5, and 6, however, are very close to being redundant. Number 7, the assertion that Jews have a lot of irritating faults, strikes us as true of any group of people we know, including Jews. Moreover, three of the other propositions might be construed as positive characteristics by many, if not most, Americans. That Jews stick together, are ambitious, and are exceedingly shrewd in business might well be said admiringly. In our experience with Jews and non-Jews, these things frequently are said admiringly—and, by non-Jews, with a touch of envy. Were such things said of Italians, would anyone think it defamation? People who belong to some other ethnic or racial groups can only wish that the same could be said of them. Of course those assertions are also amenable to a negative construction, and maybe that is what most respondents had in mind. But they are very doubtful criteria by which to measure anti-Semitism.

The ADL report says that "the number of Americans within the 'most anti-Semitic' segment has declined slowly—down only 9 percentage points in twenty-eight years—from 29 percent in 1964 to 20 percent in 1992." In addition to the doubtfulness of the measuring instrument, one may be permitted to wonder whether, in the larger scheme of historical change, a one-third decline in less than thirty years is all that slow. Further, the report notes that most of those counted as anti-Semitic are older—over 65 years of age—and have a high school education or less. Nonetheless, the head of ADL declares, "It boggles the mind that in 1992 a significant segment of American society has bought into the classical canards and stereotypes that allege Jewish power. It is distressing that the stereotypes so alive in the 1930s, which led to horrific consequences, did not die in the ashes of Europe, but have found a rebirth in America today. We find it to be sinister and dangerous."

More careful reflection might conduce to an unboggling of the mind. The power and influence of Jews in American life is not merely "alleged." The observation that Jews, who are 2 percent of the population, exercise an influence vastly disproportionate to their numbers is not based upon canards and stereotypes but on a reasonable awareness of the success of Jews in academe, the media, entertainment, business, science, and other centers of societal potency. Whether one thinks that that power is "too much" may indeed have something to do with anti-Semitism, but to deny its existence is to insult the intelligence of Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, and to invite suspicion of those who do the denying.

Anti-Semitism is not finding "a rebirth" in America today. By ADL's own, and almost certainly inflated, figures, anti-Semitism is declining, and dramatically so. Most of those counted as anti-Semitic are old people hanging on to vestigial prejudices. However doubtful the survey's methodology, ADL may be justified in worrying that black Americans are more than twice as likely to show up in the "most anti-Semitic" category than whites—37 percent to 17 percent. But even if we credit the accuracy of the data, that is clearly a

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deviation from the pattern. There will always be a certain number of people who really don't like Jews, just as there will be those (often the same people) who have a generalized dislike of other groups. But the reality is that, far from being reborn, anti-Semitism is dying in America. And none too soon.

FT

While We're At It

■ We had been meaning to mention a fine essay in *The New Republic* by Alan Wolfe of the New School for Social Research. Surveying a number of recent books on race, he writes: "As is often the case with debates of this sort, the real issue is not whether we talk about the 'underclass' or 'the undeserving poor,' but how we do so. [Herbert] Gans and [Michael] Katz do not sufficiently appreciate the struggles of the very poor who *do* have character. We ought to congratulate those who overcome extreme poverty rather than develop a language that cannot acknowledge their achievements. Moreover, such an extreme relativism of values, by celebrating 'alternative' lifestyles that are in fact symptoms of desperation, risks consigning to perpetual poverty those whom it seeks to help. But what is really at issue in the debate over the underclass is whether some of us have a right to pass moral judgment on others. And the answer must be that, so long as we live by a sense of contractual obligations, we have such a right. For no contract has only one party. The denial of the importance of morality and character, in not permitting us to make judgments about others, denies also our ability to make judgments about ourselves." Wolfe goes on to note, favorably, a number of proposals for combining welfare support with behavioral change. He concludes: "This policy would demand of the left that it take seriously white fears, while demanding of the right that it take seriously black despair. And, most important, it would give a positive answer to the question of whether we can hold everyone to the same standard when not everyone is equal. The only way to achieve equality in the future is to begin to act under its imperatives in the present. As unfair as it may be in the short run to expect a minority to conform to the standards of the majority—or to apply race-neutral laws and economic practices when race in this country is anything but neutral—we have, for the sake of everyone, no other choice."

■ According to an extensive survey by the *Los Angeles Times*, the abortion license is chiefly for the convenience of the well-to-do. "Contrasted with the widespread perception that abortion clients come from the low end of the socioeconomic ladder, women who told the *Times* poll that they had aborted a fetus tended to be better educated, working full time, earning good salaries, and generally representative of every racial and ethnic group. They also tended to be either childless or the parent of just one child, a baby boomer and living in metropolitan areas. Religion is not very important in their lives." This is but one item among many in an article that very usefully brings together survey research data on how economic class shapes attitudes toward abortion. "Abortion and 'The Poor' " by Jack Fowler is in the Fall 1992 issue of *The Human Life Review*, and it is very much worth reading. The poor, especially minority poor, are much more pro-life than the rich, although the rich typically claim that abortion is a splendid thing for poor people. Some years ago, before he felt the call to national politics, Jesse Jackson was eloquent in his witness for life. Speaking of abortion, he frequently declared, "The war on poverty has been replaced by a war on poor people." He has not said that sort of thing for a long time, not since he discovered that there could be no Rainbow Coalition without the support of the abortion industry. Unlike those for whom they presume to speak, establishment civil rights types have generally stifled any misgivings they may have had about Planned Parenthood and others who advance Margaret Sanger's racialist program for preventing the birth of the "unfit." (For Fowler and other important articles in the same issue, send $5 to *Human Life Review*, 150 East 35th Street, New York, NY 10016.)

■ The very progressive Dutch are way ahead of us in getting rid of the old and sick. While laggard Americans turn down referendums that would allow "physician-assisted suicide," Dutch doctors have moved on to braver stuff in expending thousands of the expendable each year. Of course there are codes of "ethics" that are supposed to make sure that people want to be killed before they are killed, but medicine in the Netherlands is increasingly flexible. According to an article in the international journal *Family Practice*, Dutch guidelines provide that a patient's request for death be persistent, but 13 percent of the doctors allow "a time-lapse of less than a day between the first explicit request and the implementation." When the request is made by the family rather than the patient, doctors "hardly ever" obtain a written request from the patient or a second opinion from another doctor. "One-quarter of the family doctors say that they did not ask for a second opinion before applying euthanasia or assisting with suicide." When there is a second opinion, in only one-quarter of the cases is it in writing, and even then it is usually not from an independent physician as stipulated by the guidelines. In sum, once the decision has been made that somebody would be better off dead, and if there is no legal prohibition

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against making that person dead, all the "safeguards" in the world are not likely to prevent doctors and those who are interested in having the person dead from acting on that decision. That should not come as a surprise, but the Dutch disease usefully reminds us of the obvious.

■ At the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit institution, David Nelson, the Budget Director, was reprimanded for acting in a pornographic movie. "The university's values, beliefs, and culture," said the administration in a formal statement, "stand strongly in opposition to such activity." If he does it again, says the administration, he will be "subject to immediate termination." Mr. Nelson responded with his own statement, apologizing for what he did. "I am deeply committed to the goals of Jesuit education and have worked to advance the welfare of the university. As a gay non-Christian, I have resolved my personal value conflicts with the university through my belief that the educational and humanistic values and programs of the university are far more important to me than the Church's teaching on sexuality, with which I disagree." Which, being interpreted, would seem to mean that he has resolved his value conflict with the university by arriving at the conclusion that the university is wrong about its stated values. The apology was accepted.

■ Bearing high promise are new black voices and publications offering thoughtful alternatives to the conformist wisdom of the old civil rights leadership. One is a magazine that has only recently come to our attention, *Destiny: The New Black American Mainstream*. For more information, write P.O. Box 19284, Lansing, MI 48901. Check it out, as we used to say.

■ St. Philip's Catholic Church in San Francisco is apparently one of those places where "the action's at." Jane Gross of the *New York Times* reports on a recent family festival held there, and the point of the report is that, my goodness, there were all kinds of families present—"stepfamilies and foster families, multigenerational families and gay families . . . and other configurations that have yet to be named by social scientists or counted by statisticians." Ms. Gross continues: "Even in this old-fashioned, godly haven, with crucifixions on the walls and children in neat uniforms, the families have changed indelibly but the values have not." Crucifixions on the walls? It seems the action gets a little rough at St. Philip's. The pastor, Father Michael Healy, draws the lesson to be learned: "There's such a thing as family values, but who's to say who's living up to them?" Certainly not the pastor of St. Philip's. (Crucifixions on the wall reminds us of a Detroit paper that reported some years ago on a Lutheran convention. "The procession was led by a young man carrying a 140-year-old crucifer." But then, why should we expect journalists to know any more about religion than about other matters of consequence?)

■ We do not wish to sound harsh, but Christopher Lehmann-Haupt must accept a large measure of responsibility for the *New York Times* daily book review. Here he is examining Edward O. Wilson's *The Diversity of Life*. Wilson, he says, calls us to protect elephants, whales, and other "charismatic creatures" who are "the most manifest glories" of nature. Lehmann-Haupt concludes: "So despite all the pessimism in *The Diversity of Life*, its virtue is not that it frightens but that it educates. It broadens our understanding of what Darwin revealed. It hints that even if humans weren't created by the hand of God, they may yet prove to be a blessing upon the earth." We note that Darwinism has been ratcheted up from dogma to revelation. It seems that, unlike whales and other "charismatic creatures," people are still on trial. Before whom? one wonders. Darwin perhaps.

■ Photographs by Sally Mann are in hot demand. For years she has been photographing her children in the nude, sometimes doing rude things. Critics have suggested that she is in violation of child pornography laws. According to this story in the *New York Times Magazine*, Mann rejects that out of hand. "She bristles at the word 'erotic' when applied to her photographs, preferring the less-charged 'sensual.' 'I don't think of my children, and I don't think anyone else should think of them, with any sexual thoughts,' she says. 'I think childhood sexuality is an oxymoron.' " Who would have thought, only a few years ago, that we would so miss Sigmund Freud?

■ What Henry James called "the imagination of disaster" is what Hilton Kramer thinks is missing from Daniel Boorstin's approach to history, as in his most recent book, *The Creators*. According to Kramer: "While this gives everything Mr. Boorstin writes an upbeat spirit that is unflagging in its affirmation of the progress that mankind has made since the dawn of human history, it also leaves the reader with a very limited understanding of human nature. This naturally colors his treatment of the place occupied by religion in human affairs. While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that he relegates religion to the realm of superstition, it is nonetheless true that he is more inclined to deal with religion as a subdivision of culture—hence its appearance in this history of the arts—than as a fundamental component of human history. Even his beloved Augustine, who looms so large in both *The Discoverers* and *The Creators*, is more admired for his 'philosophy of history' than for the content of his religious thought. The highest accolade Mr. Boorstin can think to bestow on Augustine is that 'his ideas would show an uncanny power to be transformed into a modern idea of progress.' Thus even the

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religious imagination must be seen to have a happy outcome."

■ A long time ago we had generally favorable comment in these pages on William F. Buckley's essay, "In Search of Anti-Semitism," which has since been turned into a book by that title. We received a number of protests from readers raising legitimate objections. But at least one or two were from anti-Semites who said they are tired of being called anti-Semites. In a recent interview, Buckley said, "I am prepared to say that anybody who would permit Israel to go down militarily is probably motivated by anti-Semitism." Nathan Glazer of Harvard picks up on that point in a review of the book. "I think I hear Mr. Buckley saying something that I have heretofore heard only Jews say: that Israel is different, even if it is a state with all the characteristics, often ugly, of other states. It is different because of the unique event that preceded it, the unique role it plays in Jewish life, the unique catastrophe for Jews its destruction would be. One does not expect non-Jews to understand this—which is why I would not go as far as Mr. Buckley in proscribing from American political life those who do not. It grates against my universalism to demand an immunity for the Jewish state and its defenders that I would not ask for others. Still, there is a case to be made. And though it is not spelled out in this book, only hinted at, that is remarkable enough."

■ If you open your mouth about cultural crisis, moral decline, and other unpleasantries, you're sure to have someone tell you that you're on a nostalgia trip, that you want to go back to the America of Norman Rockwell, Ozzie and Harriet, and so forth and so on. It is usually added that the good old days weren't all that good anyway, or never were in the first place. You know the line. But maybe it's right. Maybe you're just imagining how bad things are compared with how they were. Maybe you're just getting old and cranky. But then there comes along an item that vindicates your worryings, and then some. For instance, this item from the September 11, 1992 *CQ Researcher*. Here were the top problems in public schools as identified by teachers in 1940: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in halls, cutting in line, dress code infraction, littering. Here are the top problems as identified by teachers in 1990: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, assault. The moral: Don't knock nostalgia.

■ Some magazines boldface above an article's title a summary statement aimed, presumably, at grabbing the reader's attention. In *America* magazine we came across this one. "The institutional church has great difficulty in acknowledging that an individual priest—or a bishop, for that matter—may not be perfect." One searches through his memory to recall an article, book, or sermon of the last twenty years that suggested clergy are perfect. In vain.

■ Peter Verity is a marvelously apt name for a press spokesman. Whether it is entirely accurate in the case of the director of media for the Catholic bishops of England and Wales is another matter. Responding to the possibility that Church of England congregations, disaffected by the decision to ordain women, may seek some kind of corporate transition to Rome, Verity says that there is no provision for that and that it is "highly unlikely" that the Catholic bishops would make such a provision. In the Catholic view, says he, "A person's journey of faith is seen as a very individual experience, and that fact is taken into account with all people who seek entry into the Roman Catholic Church." Verily, Verity? Were we to believe that, it would seem to follow that all of Rome's statements over the years about the ecumenical quest for "ecclesial reconciliation" and "corporate reunion" are not to be credited. Even in England and Wales, we should like to think, the Catholic way of being Christian is not based on "very individual experience."

■ The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches responded to the Church of England decision to ordain women with a press statement announcing that "the World Council of Churches has no official policy concerning the ordination of women." He added, "We are very glad that the Church of England has concluded that the gift the Holy Spirit has given to women should be exercised in the service of the church at all levels." The Orthodox churches that belong to the WCC, and are second to none in their principled opposition to women's ordination, might want to inquire as to whether that was an unofficial press statement. Or perhaps the General Secretary's use of the first person plural is purely personal.

■ That redoubtable Jesuit, Paul Mankowski, writes to the editors of *America*: "'I don't believe the Holy Spirit will let [disaster] happen provided the Spirit hears from Catholics who are aware of their right to the Eucharist.' This from Bishop William McManus [*America*, November 14, 1992]. As I understand it, the Bishop's pneumatology runs like this: the action of the Holy Spirit is contingent upon the action of believers which is itself contingent upon their awareness of rights. A novel perspective. May I venture to suggest that the older view, in which the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, provides a surer foundation for Christian hope?"

■ The argument over the justice of the Vietnam war will not be settled by these findings, but they do challenge dramatically one deeply entrenched aspect of the conventional wisdom. That wisdom has it that Vietnam was a poor man's war, fought by those at the bottom of the social ladder while the privileged evaded duty through myriad exemptions.

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Arnold Barnett of MIT and Timothy Stanley of West Point have published a ground-breaking study demonstrating that there was very slight disparity between rich and poor in terms of the most obvious suffering in the war—the number of fatalities. In researching the income level of the communities from which those who were killed came, they discovered that in three out of four instances the death rate of those from "upscale" communities was higher than the national average. One reason may be that combat-level officers, i.e., lieutenants and captains, typically came from higher social and educational strata. The authors comment: "If untrue, the belief that affluent citizens were conspicuously missing from the Vietnam War dead is harmful to all Americans. It demeans the sacrifices of the wealthy by implying that such sacrifices were nonexistent. It demeans the sacrifices of the nonwealthy by suggesting that, manipulated and misled, they shed their blood in a conflict in which the privileged and influential were unwilling to shed theirs." The findings are the more dramatic when one takes into account the undoubted fact that the better-off had available to them academic and other immunities not available to the poor. As we said, the argument over whether U.S. actions in Vietnam were wise or just will surely continue, but the evidence would seem to be in that the criticism of the war based on "class analysis" is simply not supported by the facts.

■ Harvard, Duke, Georgetown, MIT, Tufts, Yale, and Washington. That's a formidable array of universities. They all wrote to little Westminster School in Atlanta, Georgia, protesting its policy of hiring only faculty who are professing Christians. The threatening implication is that these prestigious schools might in the future be cool toward Westminster graduates seeking admission. Westminster has, from its beginning, identified itself as "a Christian independent day school for boys and girls." In response to the heavy duty chastisement from the universities, Westminster headmaster William Clarkson says that the hiring policy is under review as part of a "plan to prepare the school for the twenty-first century." In the twenty-first century, it seems all too probable, Westminster will—as the universities that take it to task now do—assiduously discriminate on the basis of class, race, and sex. It is called affirmative action or, more candidly, quotas. One is not only permitted, one is required, to discriminate regarding differences that are thought to make a difference. Or maybe the problem is that being a Christian makes too much of a difference to be tolerated, although that is not a very plausible explanation judging by most of the Christians of our acquaintance. In any event, the homogenization of institutions of education proceeds apace, and all in the name of pluralism.

■ *Surfer* is not on our list of magazines regularly read. But a correspondent in Virginia who does read it (where does one surf in Virginia?) sends this from a recent issue. A Jodie Cooper, who apparently is something of a figure in those circles, offers her environmentalist credo: "I honestly think humankind is one of the worst forms of anything on this planet and I look at us as a form of AIDS. . . . The philosophy where people think that God put us on Earth to use and abuse everything like animals, and they're here for us to slaughter and eat and kill, I don't go along with whatsoever. To me, Mother Nature is it. That's my God!" David Vanderveen, director of the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Mich., responds in a letter to the editors with this: "Although I am for people coming to their own beliefs and, like everyone else that I know, am all for a cleaner environment, Jodie Cooper seems to be living a lie. If she is part of humankind, and humankind is a form of AIDS on Earth, then she is, as she so aptly puts it, 'one of the worst forms of anything on this planet.' And yet, Mother Nature is her god. If Ms. Cooper is destroying her god, if she is the AIDS virus on what she considers to be the divine being, why doesn't she follow her Aussie-speak and do her part? Why doesn't she sacrifice herself for the greater good? Is it her god or not? And why does she worship something she, or you or I, can supposedly wipe out? Does she want to be for the environmental movement what Nietzsche was for Christianity . . . , the God-slayer?" To which the editors of *Surfer* have this to say: "You make some really good points. Unfortunately, we have no idea what you're talking about." And that, alas, is probably true. One probably should not expect much depth in a magazine called *Surfer.*

■ Reviewing a book by Adrian Hastings about Robert Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury, the *Spectator* (London) observes: "Unlike Margaret Thatcher, Runcie readily absorbed the Oxbridge spirit, 'infinitely confident, enthusiastic, critical, amused.' Hastings lays dangerous stress on his skill as a mimic. It was not that he lacked convictions, merely that he always remained aware of 'the agnostic don lower down the table.' Hence Runcie's caution about grand theological schemes. Like T. S. Eliot he is 'continent in affirmation.'"

■ One reader, a United Church of Canada minister in Ontario, writes to say some very nice things about the journal, but also to protest a recent comment about the way the UCC is given to avoiding tough questions by tossing them back to local congregations. He writes: "As for the question of referring the matter of same-gender unions back to local congregations: as problematic as that decision is in many ways, I suspect that it is also the best hope (and probably the only hope) the United Church of Canada has, and not merely on this issue

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but on many of the other pressing issues we face. I believe that the strength of the United Church is its local congregations. If there is any possibility of renewal within the United Church, it will be spearheaded not by the actions of our head-office bureaucrats but by the actions and decisions of our local congregations. The more quickly we can find ways of giving local congregations a greater say in the future of the United Church, the more quickly we will be able to discover whether or not revitalization is, in fact, possible." We take the point. At the same time, one might ask whether the United Church of Canada is a communion or church in any ecclesially significant sense if it cannot corporately address questions of faith and morals. We have reason to believe that that question has already occurred to our Ontario correspondent.

■ *Sojourners*, a magazine that presents itself as the prophetic voice of revolutionary justice, is edited by Jim Wallis. He is not amused by an article by Michael Cromartie of the Washington-based Ethics and Public Policy Center in *Christianity Today* in which Cromartie analyzes the decline of the radical left in evangelical Protestantism. Wallis protests in the pages of CT: "Cromartie claims *Sojourners*' 'popular support has diminished significantly' and speaks of the 'marginalization' of *Sojourners*' influence, except among 'left-wing Catholics and liberal Protestants.' Most ecumenical observers would say the reverse is true; never has *Sojourners* had more relationship and partnership in as many sectors of the church's life." As it happens, Cromartie's article did not even mention *Sojourners*. One might say that Wallis is quick to recognize a shoe that fits even as he complains that it does not fit at all. As for the "reverse" that he says is true, it would seem that the reverse would be for *Sojourners* to have influence among right-wing Catholics and conservative Protestants. And that is certainly not the case. It would seem that Mr. Cromartie's original observation about the radical left in evangelicalism—in which he no doubt implicitly included *Sojourners*—is entirely on target. At the same time, Mr. Wallis is right about influence in other "sectors of the church's life." In the last several years he has become a major figure in the social action ventures of the National Council of Churches and other once-mainline institutions of what used to be called the Protestant establishment. This little item is but one more illustration of the ideological gyrations within our religious situation. You can't tell the players without a card. Which is, we would like to think, another good reason for "The Public Square."

■ The Church seems ever so much bigger from the inside than from the outside, said Chesterton, and he was right. Not the most important, but also not the least important, reminder of this is the enormous number of conferences, institutes, seminars, and the such that are, it seems, going on all over the place all the time. One of the more impressive is the National Institute for Clergy Formation which attracts well over a thousand priests each summer for segments of a five-week program (this year June 20 to July 23). This year, speakers are as various as Alice von Hildebrand, Bernard Cardinal Law, Paul Vitz, Edward Cardinal Cassidy, Avery Dulles, and your scribe. For information write Msgr. Andrew Cusack, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

■ The letters section of the journal is, in our editorial judgment, important. Very important. It is a way of continuing and expanding the conversation with authors and editors. Letters challenge, inquire, correct, and elaborate. We encourage readers to take advantage of the letters section. Frequently we are asked why we print letters that are radically opposed to the purposes of the journal. Our criteria are that letters be responsive to something we published, be reasonably coherent, and reflect a viewpoint that, no matter how much we might disagree, is relevant to the public discussion of the matter at hand. Sometimes, just for fun, we print a really dumb letter. Not every letter gets printed. Some are repetitious, some simply say that they love the journal, others that they hate it (far more love than hate, we are glad to report), and all too many letters are dated, responding to articles that appeared months earlier. Moreover, as a general rule we do not print letters that are responding to other letters. All that being understood, your letters are welcomed by the editors, and we know that the letters section is appreciatively read by other readers.

■ For those who missed our notice in the January issue: a complete index of this journal, from the premier issue of March 1989 through December 1992, is now available. It includes subjects addressed, books reviewed, and contributors. The index is available for $8, including postage and handling, from the editorial offices of First Things, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010.

■ The Arts & Entertainment Network aired some weeks ago "Charlton Heston Presents the Bible," and it received a great deal of favorable attention. Dorothy Rabinowitz of the *Wall Street Journal* thought it was smashing, but she was also bemused by the advance publicity packet sent out to the press. The burden of the press material was to assure everybody that the program really didn't have much to do with religion. Rabinowitz writes, "A specimen of the times and their cultural terrors if ever there was one, these notes include nervous explanations from executive producer Fraser Heston (the star's son) that 'This project is not about religion, it's about literature, art, and history.' Charlton Heston himself feels compelled to say that this is an acting project and that he is not 'guided by any doctrine

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nor seeking any evangelical purpose, nor converting or educating. . . .' On and on this extraordinary document continues, with director Tony Westman putting in that he was not raised in a religious household—but he knows now that the Bible is a great book whether one believes in it or not." Despite all the disclaimers aimed at avoiding the wrath of the culture police, says Rabinowitz, the program emerges as "a work steeped in religion and spiritual passion."

■ Sadik Abdul Kareem Mal-Allah, a Christian, had his head chopped off in Saudi Arabia. He was convicted of "insulting Almighty God, the Holy Quran, and the Prophet." Admittedly, he was a rather assertive Christian. The government-controlled press said that he called Islam a false religion and should be killed even if he repented. Christian witness is forbidden and conversion to Christianity is a capital crime in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Interior Ministry made a point of reporting Mal-Allah's execution, as though to remind the world that the regime was not being taken in by George Bush's claim that the Gulf War was fought in defense of freedom.

■ An underappreciated treasure of our time is Louis Dupré of Yale University. The following is from an essay titled "On Being a Christian Teacher of Humanities": "Ethics for the Christian educator ought to be more than information about values. All educational systems are value-oriented, whether they admit it or not. Value consists in what *we* value, and that may be a very one-sided, subjective ideal. Avoiding a self-centered or even an exclusively human-centered morality, the Christian looks for an absolute capable of grounding, ordering, and integrating all values. This absolute principle to which the Christian subordinates his entire value system, he or she calls God. Moral education then should be completed by *religious education*. Yet all too often religion itself is presented as adding one more value to all others, thus relativizing what ought to be an absolute ground of values. In functional terms this means that we treat religion as if it were one among many things that we ought to cultivate and learn about. But the 'object' of religion does not tolerate this kind of compartmentalization: it either includes all aspects of life or none at all. If God were only the particular subject of an academic discipline called 'religious studies' or 'theology,' he would not be God. Such a discipline is useful and, I think, in a Christian system of education, indispensable. But the transcendent presence in the educational process touches on all disciplines and, above all, becomes the integrating factor of all moral education. The objective of religious instruction consists not only in communicating the essentials of a doctrinal tradition but, even more, in assisting the student in extending the religious attitude based on that tradition to all areas of existence."

Sources: Otter Zell's criticism of "masculine gods," quoted in *Insight*, November 2, 1992. On transplants of fetal tissue, *New York Times*, November 26, 1992 and *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 21, 1992. Dr. Kevorkian quoted in the newsletter *Life at Risk*, November 1992. George Gallup figures reported in *emerging trends*, November 1992. Archbishop Weakland on the ordination of women, *New York Times*, December 6, 1992. George Weigel on Vatican diplomacy in unpublished letter. Anti-Defamation League report on anti-Semitism dated November 16, 1992.

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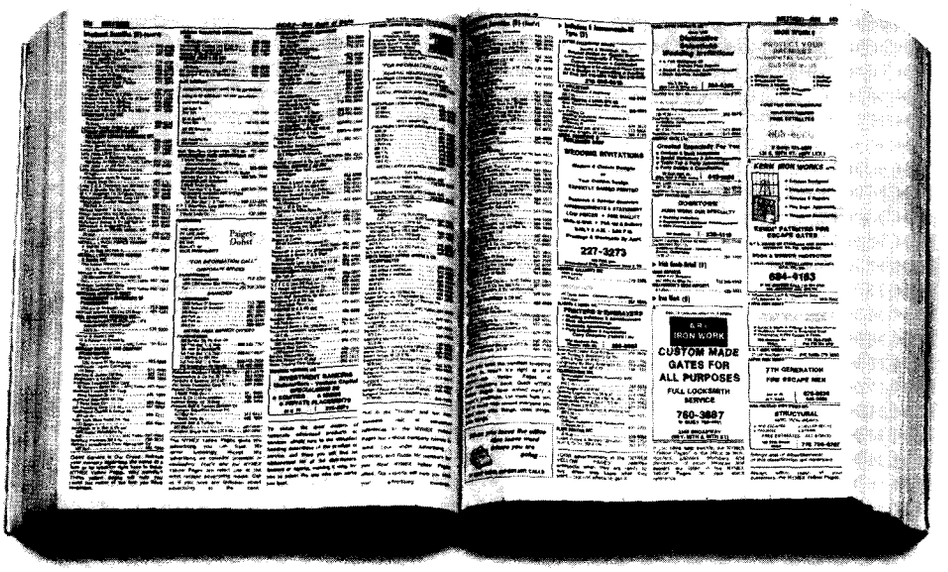

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